FROM OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT: CONTINUITIES AND RUPTURES IN DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES IN LOCAL DEMOCRACY

by

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This inquiry examines the ruptures and continuities in local democratic practices in opposition and in government. I conducted research in seven rural municipalities in Chalatenango, El Salvador where leaders of oppositional community-based organizations entered municipal politics 15 years ago. This new generation of municipal officials established forums for citizen participation that incorporate patterns of citizenship learning and participation developed in oppositional civil society. The democratic outcomes of these municipal spaces for citizen engagement are mixed, however: they improved the quality of citizen participation in municipal governance, but circumscribed autonomous forms of citizen participation. The influence of partisan political and institutional state interests are the principal factors that account for this outcome.

At the same time, civil society and local government in Chalatenango exist in a relationship of mutual influence. This suggests that efforts to foster democratic citizen participation should complement support to institutional innovation with efforts to strengthen civil society.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to the people of Eastern Chalatenango who continue to bravely struggle for justice within and without their communities.
Acknowledgements

Joseph Conrad wrote we find ourselves through work. Through this thesis project, I also found that through work it is also possible to find community. This thesis is the fruit of three years of labour. Throughout that time I benefitted from the constant encouragement, material support, and understanding family and friends. I could not have undertaken or finished this project without them.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This introductory chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I discuss the origins and purpose of this study. In the second, I locate Chalatenango’s experiments in municipal democracy in the broader landscape of local democracy in Latin America. I conclude with an overview of the content of the remainder of this document.

**Origins and Purpose of This Study**

This study examines the democratic effect of municipal governments adopting citizenship learning and participation patterns developed in civil society. Municipal governments in Eastern Chalatenango, El Salvador, present a good opportunity for studying the transfer of democratic learning and participation patterns from civil society to the state. They are located in a region that has a vigorous tradition of citizen participation in oppositional, grass-roots organizations. In addition, the municipal officials implementing these participatory practices began their political careers as leaders in civil society. These officials still identify closely with, and maintain institutional ties to civil society organizations. Finally, local governments in Chalatenango are experimenting with democratic innovations at a time when new legislation makes municipal officials responsible for intensifying and institutionalizing citizen participation at the local level. Together, these factors create an environment that encourages the adoption of practices from civil society by government, and the further expansion of local democracy.

I became interested in the democratic potential of Chalatenango’s patterns of citizenship learning and participation ten years ago, while visiting rural communities still rebuilding from the Salvadorean civil war. I was inspired by the narratives of suffering, courage, and solidarity
almost everyone I met related. I was also impressed by the number and variety of community organizations, the strong degree of citizen involvement in public life, and the relatively high level of material, and specially, social development I witnessed\(^1\). During subsequent visits to Chalatenango I saw the FMLN, the political party that emerged from the revolutionary guerrilla movement, gradually gain ground in local, and more recently, national elections. As the political left increasingly occupies positions of power in the state, expectations are high that it will break with previous patterns of governance that denied the majority of the population basic political and economic rights.

The dominant narrative in the communities in Eastern Chalatenango I studied, is about how a dispossessed, ‘uneducated,’ rural population built a network of popular organizations to fight for their rights. It tells how they survived and thrived in the face of scarcity and violent government repression through steadfast resourcefulness, collectivist bonds, and commitment to a vision of a more just society. Today leaders in these communities are experimenting with ways to transform past experiences of participation into municipal government practices that work to advance redistribution and social inclusion.

This study is motivated by a desire to understand how local democracy can be expanded, and what obstacles and facilitating factors influence this process. Over a period of three months, I researched citizen participation in seven municipalities in Eastern Chalatenango, El Salvador.

I sought to answer the following research question: *What are the continuities and ruptures between local democratic discourses and practices in opposition and in government?*

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\(^1\) For instance, most communities in Eastern Chalatenango have or are securing access to basic infrastructure such as water, housing and roads. Many communities have also established income generating communal enterprises such as bakeries, cafeterias, and pharmacies. I also saw that most communities are able to provide services such as health, and education at levels not available in other rural regions of El Salvador. The social development is also evident through the absence of the ubiquitous violent crime that is a feature of the rest of El Salvador.
I chose to look for the transfer of practices by focusing my study on Chalatenango’s CODEMs (Committees for Municipal Development). A CODEM is a permanent forum for citizen participation comprised of the municipal council, the leaders from all of the communities in their jurisdiction, and the representatives of institutions important in the public life of these towns (typically the health clinic, the public school, the police, NGOs, and the church). These leaders meet to share information about each others’ work, deliberate about and coordinate action on issues of municipal-wide concern, and receive reports of municipal government projects and spending.

While other forums for citizen participation created by municipal government exist in Chalatenango, at present CODEMs are the most significant one. This is because CODEMs provide municipally oriented forums for deliberation and action. In addition, CODEMs have continuity. The regularity and predictability of meetings and actors mean that CODEMs can support sustained public dialogues about issues of common concern in ways that other municipal public spaces do not. CODEMs also are of great importance because their high level of moral legitimacy gives weight to agreements and decisions taken there. CODEMs have become central to the pattern of state-civil society interactions and, particularly, to the way the state recognizes societal demands. Gianpaolo Baiocchi refers to this stable arrangement as the “state-civil society regime” (2005, p.18). The importance of CODEMs as an intermediary space between civil society and local government made them ideal places to research the transfer of citizenship learning and participation practices from civil society.

In March 2009, Salvadoreans voted the country’s first leftist president into office. This electoral victory can in part be attributed to the growing legitimacy of the FMLN as a more unified and stable political force. The democratic performance of FMLN municipal governments
over the previous 15 years also contributed to this acceptance. The FMLN had begun experimenting with innovations to enhance democratic citizen participation in large urban centres as well as in Eastern Chalatenango well before it was legally mandated.

**Local Democracy in Latin America**

In this section I provide a brief overview of municipal governance in Latin America to help contextualize the broader trends that give rise to growing role of municipal government in local development and citizen participation in Eastern Chalatenango.

Governance in Latin America has traditionally been characterized by a strong centralist tradition (Véliz 1980). National governments have exercised control over municipalities by directly appointing mayors and local officials, strictly applying standardizing laws, and tight financial oversight (Nickson 1995). At the start of the 1980s for instance, mayors were appointed in 23 of 26 Latin American countries, including El Salvador (Assies 2003). Furthermore, central governments in Latin America typically did not provide municipal officials with a share of national revenues large enough to allow them to obtain training or to hire qualified staff. Often this justified central government arguments that service delivery and other key responsibilities could not be transferred to local officials because they lacked the technical capacity (Nickson 1995).

At present, local governments in Latin America are experiencing a “historically unprecedented level of political authority and fiscal autonomy” (Montero & Samuels 2004, p.4). For instance, the share of government expenditures at the local level has risen from negligible levels to as high as a third in some of the larger countries such as Brazil (Stein 1999). The transition to electoral democracy and relatively greater political openness of the last decades in
Latin America has also translated into local politics. All municipal governments in the region are elected at present (Carrón 2003).

The rise in the importance of municipal governments as political actors coincides with a movement to reform and modernize the state in the region through decentralization. Much of this change is linked to a broader process of democratization that civil society agitated for during several decades. However, part of the impetus for the enhanced role of local government in the region also comes from international donor agencies and funders. The World Bank, for instance, started to focus their support on “good governance” at the local level through the 1990s (McCarney 1996).

Decentralization

Over the past twenty years, decentralization has been a defining feature of governance and citizen participation in Latin America. Governments of all types in the region have adopted decentralizing policies; whether they identify with the political left or right, whether in settings where civil society is strong or weak, and whether they are politically solvent or in crisis (Manor 1999).

The first round of decentralization in Latin America coincided with a process of democratization and adoption of market economies, and tended to focus on the transfer of responsibilities and resources. More recently, governments and international agencies promoting decentralization have emphasized the importance of enhancing the conditions for improved local government performance and service delivery (Stein 1999).

Most of the recent efforts at decentralization in Latin America have incorporated mechanisms that expand citizen participation at the local level beyond formal electoral
procedures (Anderson & van Laerhoven 2007). For instance, El Salvador, Bolivia, Venezuela, Honduras and Chile all adopted laws requiring local governments to hold regular public forums as part of decentralization reform (Campbell, 2003, Blackburn and de Toma 1998).

Official readings of decentralization tend to emphasize the importance of increased citizen participation, as well as corollary gains equity and efficiency (Gaventa 2002). Writing for the World Bank, for example, Campbell asserts that “political power sharing, not financial or state reform, was the underlying imperative in the move to decentralize decision making and spending in Latin America” (2003, p.6). The assumption that informs positions like this is that “as government comes closer to the people, more people will participate in politics that will give them representation,” (Blair, 2000, p.23), making government more transparent and receptive to the will of citizens. However, there is significant research that questions whether decentralization policies can alone translate directly into greater social inclusion (e.g. Shah & Thompson 2004; Wunsch 2001; Oluwu & Wunsch 2004), or improve local democracy (Devas & Delay 2006). Critically examining the origins of decentralization policies, Rivera argues that external funders promote decentralization as a strategy to encourage governments decrease public spending while responding to increased social demands (2003). Rivera goes on to argue that decentralization is part of a broader movement to remodel the Latin American State along neo-liberal imperatives (Ibid). In their empirical survey of the national dynamics that inform decentralization in specific cases, Devas & Delay found that expanding democratization is consistently secondary to other interests such as the priorities of local and national elites, political constraints in central government, and external pressure from donors and lenders (2006).

Also arguing from empirical evidence, Anderson & van Laerhoven contend that advocates of decentralization on democratic grounds often ignore how local context and the
variations in the design and implementation of decentralization policy affects outcomes (2007). The literature also reports a number of specific problems with decentralization including: that it can reinforce patterns of corruption and clientelism where accountability monitoring systems are weak (Nickson 1995, p.84); increase inequalities between regions and foster fiscal instability when tax revenue systems are not carefully recalibrated (Hofman, & Kaiser 2002); and have an uneven record of delivering on the promises of improved local equity and service delivery (Platteau 2004; Harris, Stokke & Tornquist 2005).

In Central America, decentralization has been part of regional institutional discourses since the beginning of the 1990s. As elsewhere, decentralization has usually been framed as a process of expanding municipal competencies and capacities to better respond to social demands (Ortega Hegg & Wallace 2003).

**Locally-driven Democratic Innovation in Latin America**

Not all of the important innovations to state – civil society regimes in Latin America have been motivated by institutional interests or initiated from national levels of government. Porto Alegre’s participatory budgeting process is a locally-animated democratic experiment that has influenced patterns of civic participation in local government throughout the region².

Today there are more than 1,200 viable participatory budgeting experiments in Latin America. These forums have demonstrated to improve levels civic participation, particularly among poor and traditionally marginalized populations, and to facilitate a more equitable and efficient distribution of resources (Marquetti 2002, Wampler 2007).

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² Participatory budgeting is a process that transfers binding decision-making power over the allocation of municipal resources to citizen forums. Citizen assemblies define spending priorities and elect representatives to participate in deliberative processes with counterparts from other districts of the municipality.
In some instances participatory budgeting mechanisms have also functioned as schools of engaged citizenship and deliberative democracy. Schugurensky argues that “people learn to become more informed, engaged, and critical citizens who can deliberate and make decisions...about the common good” (2003, p.614). Additional research about participatory democracy in Porto Alegre also indicates that these exercises stimulate an increase in the number and connections between citizen associations (Baiocchi 2002; Abers 2001)\(^3\).

These findings are significant for this study into the effect of transfer of practices from civil society to the local state because they demonstrate that state-sponsored democratic reform can also positively shape spaces for citizen participation. I also highlight participatory budgets in this discussion to illustrate that the CODEMs of Eastern Chalatenango in this study are part of a broader landscape of experimentation with citizen participation in local governance in Latin America. These experiments were nurtured by the institutional openings created by democratization, and sometimes, by the decentralization process discussed above.

**Organization of this Study**

In Chapter Two: Research Process, I outline some of the assumptions informing my investigation and describe my data collection process. In Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review, I present some of the theoretical discussions I draw upon to help interpret the relationship between state and civil society. I also review relevant literature on the behaviour of oppositional groups once they achieve state power. In Chapter Four: Setting the Context, I

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\(^3\) A recent global survey identified participatory budgeting as “exceptional” among current democratic innovations (Smith, G. 2006, p.111). While there are many reasons to be optimistic about participatory budgeting, there are questions about their applicability beyond the local context, as well as about their use in the context of budgetary cutbacks by conservative governments.
provide an introduction to the history, political landscape, and relationships between civil society and municipal government in Chalatenango.

I present the patterns of participation found in civil society and replicated in the spaces for participation provided by local governments in Chapter Five: Findings. In this chapter I also discuss how these new spaces are changing not only the state-civil society regime, but also the possibilities for civic public life independent of the state in Chalatenango. In Chapter Six: Analysis and Interpretation, I examine some of the possible causes for the mixed democratic results of state-sponsored spaces for participation in Chalatenango. I draw on the research into other experiences and theories of state-civil society relations I present in this chapter and in Chapter Two. In Chapter Seven: Concluding Reflections and Recommendations, I recapitulate my main findings and discuss their implications for expanding local democracy, and for further research.
Chapter Two

Research Process

_Situating My Assumptions, Research Participants & Self_

**Epistemological Starting Point**

My study is founded on the assumption that the lived experience and opinions of research participants are valuable and valid sources of knowledge. I complement this starting point by also adopting an epistemology of situated and partial truth (Haraway 1991) that suggests that all knowledge is subjective, and situated in a particular socio-historical and cultural context (Scott 2001). This second position opens the door to examining ways in which the experience of the participants in my study is socially constructed.

**Situating the Position of the Research Participants in this Study**

I applied this stance to my research by looking at ways in which the views of participants regarding participation in civil society and the state might be drawing upon common sense understandings that reflect locally dominant discourses. For instance, most of the leaders I interviewed were reluctant to openly discuss the democratic shortcomings of the FMLN or civil society organizations. Only in exceptional cases, did some of the research in this study participants speak openly about limitations in the way that civil society and local government organize citizen participation. While this may have been influenced by my status as outsider, I frequently observed the same dynamic at play between citizens in the communities I studied. When I did hear critical assessments of participation patterns among community members, these occurred in the course of intimate conversations, through humour, or in unguarded movements. For example, I only learned about the notion that former guerrilla leaders tend to be less
inclusive municipal leaders through a casual conversation at the end of an interview where a participant had mainly reiterated the perspective of the FMLN. I gradually came to see that research participants are involved in a process of interpreting their own experiences through the revolutionary discourse of social transformation, sacrifice and unity that still underlies much of public life in Easter Chalatenango.

This narrative built around the values of solidarity, selflessness, and combativeness inspired and sustained many Chalatecans through the persecution, personal loss, and suffering that were a part of the war experience of all the research participants in this study. In the national context of El Salvador, where the municipalities I studied have historically been marginalized, this revolutionary discourse is counter-hegemonic. Locally, this revolutionary is the prevailing cultural point of reference. It continues to inform patterns and expectations of participation today. During interviews, many research participants filtered their experiences and views through this revolutionary narrative.

Through my research I also learned that dominant narratives are not determinant. Research participants often interpreted events according to where they are situated in relation to civil society and state. For example, I observed very different responses to the FMLN’s decision in 2007 to abolish internal elections for candidates to public office and to the number of terms they can serve: for an FMLN mayor this was “unimportant because the party base still gets who they want,” while a civil society leader called it “an aberration and a grave thing.”

As a researcher I tried to develop sensitivity for identifying institutional revolutionary discourse, and distinguishing it from more direct accounts of experience. I did this by looking for

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4 This mayor’s rationale is that the FMLN still uses an internal consultation process. The official explanation the leadership of the FMLN gives for discarding internal elections is that it reduces the perception of internal conflict within the party. The overwhelmingly pro-establishment Salvadoran media traditionally exploits these conflicts to undermine the credibility of the FMLN.
ways to contextualize the accounts I heard: accepting the views of research participants, at face value, but also looking for clues in their speech or personal background that embedded locally dominant discourses.

**Situating Myself**

I have also sought to apply the view that knowledge is situated and requires contextualization to myself. I understand this position to have at least two implications for my research study. It requires me to abandon claims to “objective” truth and “neutrality” (Smith, D. 2005)\(^5\), and insists that I disclose my own position.

I have a deep affection, admiration and respect for the resilience and courage of the people in the communities of Chalatenango. I am also an expatriate Salvadorean. While I sympathize and openly support Chalatecans aspirations for greater justice and democracy, I am distanced from them by our different personal histories, levels of privilege, and ultimate stake in the outcomes of their democratic work. I always have the option to leave. The feeling of proximity and distance is mutual. I worked as a community development volunteer in Chalatenango between 2001 and 2003. During that time, as during the stay for this research project, community leaders defined me as a friend, “political student” and technical resource person. This identity gained me entry and acceptance into Chalatenango’s communities, and also defined me as an outsider.

I make note of my relationship with the people in the communities of Chalatenango I studied because it provides the background for this study. At its broadest, my research is motivated by the desire to contribute to the process of reflection and learning that the

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\(^5\) I am also working from the assumption that this approach to knowledge is fully consistent with a research process that is informed, ethical, and rigorous.
municipalities and communities I studied are already involved in. When I offer a critical view of the experiments in citizenship learning and participatory democracy evolving in Chalatenango, I try to do so in this spirit. I plan to close the circle of this research process by returning to Chalatenango to share my observations and interpretation with the participants in this study, and with others working in the field of local democracy in Chalatenango.

Rationale for Choosing Chalatenango as a Case Study

Chalatenango is of interest to the theory and practice of local democracy because in this setting it provides the opportunity to observe the results of the adoption of citizen participation from ‘above’ in a setting that developed and nurtured citizen participation practices from ‘below’. The accumulated store of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, practices and organizations of participation already present in civil society, provide a fertile ground for innovations in municipal democracy. The Salvadorean central government’s adoption of a regulatory framework that mandates the implementation of citizen participation by El Salvador’s local governments has created the institutional opening for local governments to build on local patterns of citizen participation.

One of the unique features of Chalatenango is that many of the people implementing these municipal participation practices from within local government were guerrilla and communal leaders during a time of civil war. They now have the opportunity to implement the reforms for which they fought from without. As a researcher, I was curious to know whether this confluence of participatory, oppositional civil society and ideologically sympathetic municipal governments could produce more democratic, inclusive, and redistributive local governance.
Data Collection

I used a variety of qualitative methods to conduct this research study: I conducted interviews with municipal and communal leaders, observed citizen participation events organized by municipal governments, and collected public documents on citizen participation produced by local governments and civil society actors.

I conducted the bulk of the research for this study between October and December 2007 in Chalatenango, during a work and research internship funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, and coordinated through the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. My institutional host was CORDES, a local non-governmental development organization with 17 years of working in Chalatenango. CORDES facilitated my access to CODEMs and other citizen participation events sponsored by municipal governments. It was through my attendance at these events that I was able to recruit the municipal and civil society leaders who are the primary interview subjects in this study.

This primary group consists of 12 participants, five women and seven men. Six of these informants are, or have been, municipal councillors, and two of them have experience as mayors. All of these participants are, or have been, leaders in community-based organizations (CBOs) in civil society, and all are active participants in CODEMs in their municipality. These participants are spread out over six municipalities: Chalatenango (two), San José Las Flores (one), Nueva Trinidad (three), Arcatao (three), Las Vueltas (one), and Nombre de Jésus (two). With the exception of the participants from the town of Chalatenango proper, all live in the Eastern sector of the province of Chalatenango - a region mainly controlled by the FMLN guerrilla army during most of El Salvador’s 12-year civil war. All but two actively supported the armed revolutionary movement. I selected this group of informants based on their active engagement in grass-roots
community-based organizations and social movements (minimum of seven years), and their experience as members of municipal government, or as leaders in the spaces for citizen participation organized by municipal government.

I conducted semi-structured interviews lasting between one and three hours with each of these participants in their own communities. During these conversations, I asked informants to tell me about the process through which they became active citizens and leaders, their understanding of democracy and citizen participation in Chalatenango, how they view the transition from community to municipal leadership, and their assessment of citizen participation in municipal government today. I also invited participants to share their views on the relationship between civil society, political parties and government (See Appendix A: Interview Guide).

A second group of research participants consisted of people who are not direct actors in citizen participation in civil society or municipal governance in Chalatenango, but who have experience supporting or studying these initiatives. I conducted informal interviews with three university researchers⁶, a prominent local priest, and one municipal bureaucrat. This last person was the only research participant in my study who openly identified with ARENA, the party of the political right in El Salvador. I relied on these informants to provide a more critical understanding of citizen participation issues in Eastern Chalatenango. During these interviews, I asked participants about their views of citizenship learning and about citizen participation in civil society and municipal government in Chalatenango, and more generally, in El Salvador.

I also collected data on the transfer of citizenship learning and participation practices by observing nine CODEM meetings in the same six municipalities listed above, plus one in San Isidro, the only place where I did not also conduct interviews. In addition, I observed two

⁶ Two are political science professors at the Jesuit University of Central America, while the third is the Dean of Social Sciences at the Lutheran University of El Salvador.
municipal town-hall meetings, and the annual general assemblies of two regional civil society organizations. I chose this method of data collection to complement my interviews detailing the accounts of how citizen participation is organized in government-sponsored spaces and civil society.

During my research stay in Chalatenango I also collected public education and resource materials used by municipal governments in CODEMs, and citizen participation events. These include annual reports, budget updates, and surveys of the resources and needs of communities. I also drew on the training materials municipal governments, civil society organizations and NGOs use in during public events related to municipal governance.

In addition, I also participated in a regional conference on municipal governance and transparency organized by the Salvadorean government attended exclusively by non-FMLN municipal governments. This event was useful in providing me with a sense of how municipal governments in regions without a history of active civil society engagement implement citizen participation. Finally, this research project also draws on my knowledge of Chalatenango’s social relations and actors. This is knowledge that I accumulated during multiple visits to the region, as well as during a two-year period when I lived and worked there.

**Working Across Contexts**

Working across languages and social settings was one of the particular challenges of this research project. I did most of my reading, drafted my research proposal, obtained research ethics approval, and developed investigation tools in English. English was also the language in which I processed and wrote up my data. However, I conducted the actual research that formed the core of my work in Spanish.
Completing phases of the research cycle in different languages required not only translation work, but also interpretation across cultural traditions. I often had to search for ways to communicate terms widely used in Chalatenango (and Latin America), that have no clear equivalent in the Canadian intellectual context. One example is the concept of “organizing.” Literally, Chalatecans use it to refer to the process of establishing or becoming a member of a structured group of citizens, usually a geographical community. In Chalatenango organizing is intimately associated with the history of popular resistance where citizens grouped together to increase their power in order to confront socially dominant actors, traditionally the state. Until recently, the Salvadorean government considered “organizing” a criminal activity. The term still retains connotations of militancy and revolt. Justo, a community leader from Nueva Trinidad, embeds a definition of organizing into his narration: “if we had not been united, if we had not helped each other, if we had not organized, they would have killed us.”

Working across cultural settings and systems of meaning adds an additional step to the standard selection and synthesis of information that is always a part of presenting research findings. Larger and denser amounts of information need to be communicated and a higher degree of interpretation is involved. Being bilingual in Spanish and English, and my previous exposure to Chalatenango helped to reduce the possibility of these problems becoming barriers to the research. This allowed me to proceed with my investigation without further mediation, and to draw on my own built knowledge of the local context and actors for interpreting what I learned.

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7 de Sousa Santos (2005) takes the discussion about the interpretation one step further. He argues that the dominant strand of academic knowledge production in the social sciences is biased towards the historical context of the global North (i.e. taking it as normative), and that as a consequence this scholarship is not well suited to accounting for social meanings and innovations from the global South. Although I do not adopt the radical conclusion of his argument, it did sensitize me to this challenge.
Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The potential transfer of patterns of citizenship learning and participation from civil society to the state hinges in large part on the nature of the relationship between these actors. In this chapter I review selected theoretical discussions and research literature relating to state–civil society relations to assist me in understanding how this relationship functions in Chalatenango.

I begin by outlining parts of Jurgen Habermas’ ideas about the public sphere that immediately relate to my thesis. I then seek to balance Habermas’ emphasis on the separation between state and civil society with other approaches that acknowledge and examine the relation of mutual influence I observed between civil society and state in Chalatenango.

Because my study focuses on municipal leaders and practices that originated in oppositional civil society organizations, I also review selected literature on the democratic behaviour of contentious and revolutionary groups once they capture state power. I revisit these concepts in Chapter Six, where I relate them to my research findings.

Civil Society – State Relations

In their historical and philosophical review, Cohen and Arato define civil society as a “strong net of organizations supposed to mediate between macro worlds of state agency and economy on the one hand and the micro world of anonymous individuals on the other” (1992, p.92). Similarly, Adamson emphasizes the separation between civil society and the state by conceptualizing civil society as the “the public space between large-scale bureaucratic structures
of state and economy on the one hand, and the private sphere of family, friendship, personality, and intimacy on the other” (1987, p.320).

Jurgen Habermas builds on these ideas of the normative separation between state and civil society. He develops the concept of the public sphere as a place where citizens discuss matters of general interest and form public opinions free from coercion (1989a, p.231). More specifically, Habermas defines the public sphere as an arena where people can come together to deliberate about the common good, and to create a reasoned, critical discourse that gives or removes legitimacy from government. A touchstone of this conceptual construct is the separation between the public sphere or civil society and the state (Habermas 1989b, pp.27-28).

Elsewhere Habermas places the public sphere into an integrated theory of society. In this articulation, he divides society into lifeworld and systemsworld. Lifeworld is the arena where citizens develop identity, build social bonds and produce culture (Thompson 1983, p.285). Systemsworld is the substrata of society that maintain the lifeworld, namely the state and the market (Ibid., p.285). According to Habermas, the market and state are non-democratic spaces because they subsume or instrumentalize persons to the imperatives of administrative and economic power respectively. In fact, market and state operate under a mutually exclusive and competing organizing logic than that of civil society (Tweedy & Hunt, 1994, p.294; Thompson 1983, p.288).

For the purposes of the present study, Habermas’ theory is principally useful because it provides an integrative framework for understanding the different imperatives that inform the

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8 Habermas does not explicitly develop the link between the public sphere and civil society. However, the social institutions and ideal conditions for cultural and language transmission required by the public sphere, can only be found in civil society (Cohen & Arato 1992, p.229; Tweedy & Hunt 1994, p.293).

9 The lifeworld operates on a logic of social integration - through the medium of idealized rational communication, while systems operate on an imperative of goal attainment - through the mediums of administrative power and money (Tweedy & Hunt, 1994, p.294).
strategic and practical decisions of state and civil society actors. However the theory of the public sphere in its traditional articulation is not applicable to the Chalatenango context. The research participants in my study operate from the assumption that civil society and state overlap in practice. Their understanding is based on the lived experience of collaboration and cross-over between political party, state and civil society. Overall, my data suggests that the boundary between civil society and state can be more porous and the relationship between them more dynamic and reciprocal than Habermas suggests.\(^{10}\)

Not regarding the state and civil society as normatively exclusive opens the possibility of seeing how the state can encourage and even nourish democratic practices and attitudes in civil society (Robsteutsche 2005). More specifically, by paying attention to the intersections between state, market and civil society it may be possible to see how democratic spaces in a given setting can be broadened as well as circumscribed by the interplay between political and economic forces, and conversely how participatory spaces may affect outside forces (Friedland 2001).

Relational approaches to understanding the nature of the connection between civil society and the state present a useful complement to Habermas’ theory. From a relational theoretical perspective, relations between actors are regarded as dynamic, interconnected and ongoing processes, rather than as static ties among inert objects (Emirbaryer 1997). Terms of analysis such “civil society” and “state” can themselves understood as interpenetrating and fluid, rather than discrete and bounded (Ibid, p. 302). This analytical orientation appears to more adequately

\(^{10}\) The theory life and systems worlds does recognize that “exchange relations” do occur between the life-word (civil society) and the state. In fact, Habermas’ understanding of the colonization of life-word is based on this relationship. However, Habermas still conceptualizes civil society and state as wholly circumscribed categories (Thompson 1983, p.287). He goes further in fact to assert that the market and the state are constantly encroaching on or colonizing civil society (Calhoun 1992, p.39), and that democracy can only be re-established by enforcing their separation; a process that for Habermas can only be initiated from within civil society (Habermas 1993, p.444).
suit the intertwined and dynamic relationship between state and civil society that I observed in Chalatenango, where civil society also exerts pressure on the democratic behaviour of the state.

A weakness of relational approaches for understanding how civil society and the state configure intermediary spaces for citizen participation, is that they do not always account for power asymmetries between these actors. While both state and civil society may participate in the creation of, and benefit from engaging with intermediary spaces, municipal governments possess a greater share of power: in Chalatenango, the local state has the legal, operational, fiscal position of superiority in relative terms, and within the arenas of participation it provides to citizens and citizen groups.\(^\text{11}\)

In their influential text systematizing innovative experiments in deliberative democracy, Fung and Wright (2003) also work from the assumption that the state and civil society can mutually influence one another. Their overall emphasis, however, tends to be on improving the institutional preconditions where public dialogues take place in order to ensure more just, democratic outcomes. Cohen and Rogers point out that this approach does not fully account for the power differentials between actors - either between the state and civil society, or among civil society actors – to undermine deliberative processes (2003, p.255).

Taking my cue from this discussion, I approach the analysis of my research findings by attempting to account for the overlapping quality of state – civil society relations, as well as how the differences in power and interests between these actors can distort this relation in deliberative spaces.

Cornwall (2004) provides a useful starting point for this type of synthesis. Cornwall draws attention to how arenas of citizen participation are embedded in particular cultural and

\(^{11}\) Municipal governments bestow Communal Associations with the recognition they need to obtain legal status. They are also in charge of the procedural aspect of the spaces for participation it provides. Municipal governments are responsible for convening and chairing meetings, providing logistical support, and for funding these forums.
power configurations. From this perspective, the democratic outcomes of state-sponsored spaces for citizen participation depend on the interplay between already established local patterns (of relationships, power, knowledge, etc.), and the design of these spaces. This contextualized approach is consistent with the type of interface I observed in the communities I studied in Chalatenango, where local participation patterns and interests encounter institutional ones, at times coinciding, and at times conflicting with them.

Cornwall also develops the idea of space as metaphor for understanding and differentiating the functional nature of civic arenas in the intermediary spaces between civil society and state. She proposes a classification that differentiates between “invited spaces,” or forums for citizen participation provided by the state, and “popular spaces” where citizens come together at their own initiative. She allows for fluidity and overlap in these spaces by insisting that the boundaries and identities between these types of spaces are unsettled: popular spaces may become official when sanctioned by the state, and conversely, invited spaces can function as sites of dissent (“claimed spaces”) or of collaboration with the state (Ibid.).

**OppositionalMovements Inside the State**

The contentious origins of civil society groups in Eastern Chalatenango continue to influence public life in both civil society and local government today. Municipal leaders who began their political careers in communal organizations largely continue to define their administrations in opposition to the Salvadorean central state. In Chapter Five where I discuss the findings of this study, I describe how this contentious identity influences the character of state-sponsored spaces for citizen participation. In the remainder of this chapter, I lay the groundwork for interpreting the effects of this oppositional identity on participatory spaces by
reviewing selected literature on the democratic behaviour of oppositional groups that achieve state power.

Relations between state and civil society groups in Latin America have frequently been contentious. National governments across the region have frequently colluded with economic elite groups to use the state to protect exploitative social relations. Many times in the region’s history, oppositional civil society movements have responded with revolt by aimed at taking control of the state.

Ellner (2004) outlines three broad visions that have emerged in the political practice of oppositional movements in Latin America in the post-Cold War period. These are: bridging strategies - emphasizing the importance of building broad centre-left alliances and of accepting structural constraints to change; anti-neoliberal approaches - advancing an agenda of gradual change toward socialism; and anti-imperialist approaches - advocating for policies of radical change and privileging the importance of the local, while paying attention to geopolitical context, and subjective factors to transforming political reality.

These ideal types are useful in locating the wide range of policies pursued by oppositional political groupings in modern Latin America as they pursue and obtain state power. In the current juncture, the policies of these oppositional groupings range from instances of leftist moderation, in Brazil and Uruguay for example, to the more ambitious programmes for social transformation and inclusion of impoverished populations adopted by national governments in Venezuela and Bolivia.

External factors help begin to understand the variation in the stances adopted by oppositional political parties in power in Latin America. For example, Hunter (2007) points out the importance of the positioning of the national economy in relation to global markets to setting
parameters for Latin American oppositional parties that seek to achieve electoral success. She argues that counties with diversified, export dependent economies, like Chile, are more likely to produce governance arrangements that are more cautious, and pragmatic. For instance, following the second loss of its presidential candidate, the leadership of Brazil’s Workers’ Party (PT) modulated some of its more radical policies regarding nationalization of key sectors of the economy. This won the PT increased popular support.

A second important factor influencing the behaviour of oppositional parties in government is the performance of past administrations, and particularly institutional strength of the political party system. In countries like Bolivia where political parties were not relatively well anchored in civil society, and where citizens held the political establishment responsible for the state’s deficient functioning, there was a greater opening for an outside force with an agenda of sweeping reforms to achieve electoral success (Ibid.).

While a reading of the economic and institutional landscape provides a sense of the opportunities and limitations available to an oppositional political force that wins state power, it does not explain how they choose a particular policy path. Oppositional political parties do not necessarily respond in linear, unreflexive ways to exogenous forces. The literature offers two complementary models of how these parties choose their policy and electoral strategies.

The historical institutionalist perspective stresses the lasting influence the origins of a political formation – its ideology, internal structure, commitment to core-supporters – has on its character and political programme. From this perspective, the responses of political parties are primarily conditioned by their past history, and while some innovation may occur, continuity is prevalent (Panebianco 1988, p.xiii; Levitsky 2003, p.13).
Rational actor perspectives on the other hand, tend to view political parties as strategic entities primarily concerned with winning elections. Political parties, including oppositional parties, will accordingly shape their policy and electoral strategy in response to institutional incentives and constraints (Przeworski & Sprague 1986, p.11; Cox 1997, p.56). This perspective suggests that since most political parties experience a strong pull towards vote maximization, they tend to converge towards a common middle ground.

The Workers’ Party (PT) of Brazil again presents a useful illustration of the pressures towards internal change at play within oppositional political groupings. The PT began as a broad-based, left-of-centre political formation; the first in Brazil not created that country’s political elite (Mainwaring 1999). Today the PT maintains key institutional features that link it to this past, such as internal organization structures, and norms on transparency regulating the behaviour of PT candidates and elected officials. However, over time the PT also modulated policy in key areas, like fiscal management, to secure the acceptance of the international financial system, and of segments of the electorate outside its traditional support base (Hunter 2007).

Roberts (2002) has identified the disengagement of political parties in Latin America from their constituencies in civil society as an important trend. She argues that political parties in Latin America are becoming more verticalist as a result of neo-liberal policies that produce the disintegration of corporatist, class-based organization. Roberts found that civil society in Latin American is increasingly organizing along “associative networks” that are more local, theme or identity based. This disarticulation between party leadership and ‘base’ also affects oppositional political formations, and may influence the extent to which oppositional groups are motivated to or held accountable for implementing democratic reform once in power.
Relations with the state apparatus, particularly the bureaucracy, are another significant factor conditioning the behaviour of oppositional political groupings in government. Alfredo Natal conducted innovative research into the cross-over experience of civil society activists that become government officials in Mexico. He found that institutional constraints inside the state such as bureaucratic resistance, lack of bargaining power, and weak connection with civil society ultimately limited the ability of these officials to implement policies of reform (2007).

Arguably, many of these same constraints also apply and may even be amplified for oppositional political groups in government because these formations would often not have experience in the areas of management and negotiation, nor have the support of the media and other social actors that may be suspicious of, or hostile to their policies. The logic of governance (configurations of power, limited resources and institutional arrangements) may force even oppositional political groups committed to strengthening civil society to make choices that close opportunities for popular participation once they are in power.

**The Case of Armed Oppositional Groups**

Guerrilla organizations that have become political parties are an important sub-set of oppositional groups that cross over into state power for this study: the municipal and communal leaders I interviewed study identify belong to a political party that grew out of an armed insurgency.

The incorporation of guerrilla groups into the political system has been studied from a rational actor perspective. However, the historical roots of revolutionary political groupings are particularly important in determining policy decisions. Insurgent movements tend to be more

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12 These studies tend to privilege the rational actor perspective where an insurgency’s decision to exchange armed resistance in favour of competition in an institutional political system is a matter of cost assessment. (Soberg Shugart 1992; Hipsher 1996).
committed than other political groups to implementing a particular ideological programme, or to maintaining a position of “maximalism” – preference for unconditional victory over negotiation (Close & Prevost 2007, p.11). Moving away from this stance represents a significant shift for oppositional groups.

Insurgent groups also face additional challenges to functioning democratically within an electoral political party system once they opt for institutional life. They are faced with having to abandon patterns of verticalism, such as discipline, command structures and hierarchy, that are better suited to the battlefield than to the internal functioning of a political party. Insurgent groups are also confronted with having to develop a relationship with civil society based on autonomy, sometimes for the first time (Deonandan 2007). Finally, the transition from insurgency to party usually involves a number of operational and cultural adjustments, namely moving from secrecy, coercion, and from declarations of principle, to relative openness, persuasion, and policy analysis (Close 2007).

Sometimes former guerrilla parties remain hierarchical, using centralized structures even after they transition to become political parties in electoral contests. While it seems logical to suggest that this structure may be a hold-over from verticalist patterns established for combat, Deonandan (2001) offers other plausible explanations. First, internal authoritarianism may be a rational choice of parties seeking to consolidate their power and dominance (p.238). Second, even when authoritarianism is not a deliberate strategy, centralization may result from charismatic, personalist, organizational patterns. Based on an analysis of the Sandinista Party in neighbouring Nicaragua, Close concludes that the centralization of power within former guerrilla political parties, and in their relations with civil society, should not be regarded solely as a “disease of insurgents” (2007, p.35). He rightly points out that lack of democracy is a feature of
all political parties in the region, and that moving to this pattern of relating may be a response to “common wisdom” if the party wants to attain power. This position is important to the Chalatenango context because it underscores how important previously established patterns of conducting public life can be for the success of subsequent political innovations.

Another important factor conditioning the democratic performance of revolutionary groups entering state power is how they get there. In her study of post-revolutionary politics in Africa, Dorman (2006), found that political groups that attained power through armed victory tended to establish hegemonic revolutionary regimes that maintained a strong ideological commitment in discourse, but that in practice implemented policies to consolidate and retain power. Alternately, armed movements that obtained state power through negotiated settlement and electoral victory, tended to modulate their electoral position to win voters and international legitimacy.

Guerrilla movements, to a greater degree than other oppositional political formations, aspire to popular support as the foundation for their political struggle. However, commentators like Lievesly point out that there has been a longstanding tension in the relationship between popular movements and the organized political left in Latin America. He posits that this is the result of vanguardist attitudes in the political left that presuppose the hegemony of the party in their relationship with the people it sought to liberate (2005).

Cultural critic, Saldaña-Portillo contends that these hierarchical, excluding patterns are embedded in the ideology of revolutionary movements, and not just in their tactics. She contends that the concept of subjectivity and citizenship in Latin American revolutionary discourses is not essentially different from the liberal universalist narrative that produced the systems of domination revolutionaries sought to overturn (2003).
Saldaña-Portillo develops the argument that both universalist and revolutionary visions of society share a call to vanguard leadership destined to reform the consciousness of disenfranchised, less modern subjects. In practice, this usually refers to women, peasants, youth, and indigenous and other racialized peoples (Ibid.).

Conducting research in the same region of Chalatenango that I study, Silber, encountered a decline in citizen participation in public life of communities despite the publicly-minded, revolutionary identity of the recent past, and the high organizational capacity still present in these communities. She argues that this fall is the result of citizen disillusionment with the verticalist revolutionary model of political participation that still conditions patterns of citizen participation in Chalatenango. This model, she asserts, continues to require unity, sacrifice and militancy, while it systematically excludes women, fails to provide all citizens with the means to comprehensively improve their living conditions (2000). Silber in particular focuses on narratives of disillusionment among women who experience violence and exclusion within the very civil society structures that promised emancipation (2004).

Silber’s observations regarding the partial, and precarious nature of most of the material and political gains Chalatecans have made, and about the decline in participation are consistent those of municipal leaders and citizens I interviewed. However, her analysis challenges many of their accepted assumptions.

I compare Silber’s observations and analysis, and more generally, the discussion about the democratic behaviour of oppositional groups, as well as the ideas about the relationship between state and civil society in Chapter Six.
Chapter Four

Setting the Context

This chapter provides a brief outline of the social landscape in Chalatenango. I begin with a short introduction to El Salvador, the province of Chalatenango, and the seven municipalities where I conducted my research. I then turn to describing civil society in Chalatenango by outlining the evolution of key organizational structures. I conclude with an outline of municipal governance and citizen participation in local government in El Salvador and Chalatenango. This chapter is intended to provide sufficient context about Chalatenango to help readers understand the nature of state-civil society relations, as well as the character of the citizenship learning and participation practices civil society developed.

General Setting

El Salvador is the smallest, most densely populated country in the continental Americas\textsuperscript{13}. El Salvador has been historically characterized by large gap in the distribution of income between the rich and poor. From colonial times, a small elite has dominated the distribution of land, the primary source of wealth in this country, to produce successive generations of export-oriented cash crops (Browning 1998/1975). From the 1930s onward, this landed elite maintained their position in Salvadorean society through a pact with the military, which allowed the latter to control the state. This political economic arrangement, and the exclusion and poverty it produced, resulted in semi-regular cycles of social unrest and repression (Montgomery 1982).

\textsuperscript{13} El Salvador has a landmass of 21,000 km\textsuperscript{2}, and a population of 5.7 million (Acevedo et al., 2008, p.315).
At the beginning of the 1960s, El Salvador’s cycles of agitation for change and repression became more pronounced and generalized. Mass organizations that brought together unionists, peasants, students and other sectors proliferated and organized to exert concerted pressure for political democracy and land reform. Social tensions during this period of Salvadorean history culminated with the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980 while he officiated mass. Romero’s murder led many Salvadoreans active in the protest movements to conclude that reform would be impossible through peaceful political process, and to join the armed insurgency.

The subsequent civil war lasted 12 years and concluded with neither the Salvadorean right-wing government, nor the leftist guerrilla movement able to achieve military victory. The Salvadorean war ended in 1992 through a negotiated Peace Agreement. This treaty ended the era of political repression and established a formal electoral democracy that facilitated the entry of the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN) into the political system. However this agreement did not in practice change the economic conditions that were also at the root of the war. Wealth in El Salvador continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few. The country remains among those with the highest levels of inequality in the world, (Pleitez & Vasquez 2007). According to USAID, for instance, the poorest 20% of Salvadoreans receive less than 3% of the country’s wealth (USAID 2007), while the richest 20 percent of Salvadorean households have 58.3% of its income. Consequently, the proportion of Salvadoreans living in poverty and extreme poverty rises yearly; by 5.4% to 40% in 2008 (Trujillo 2008). All of these indicators are today worse than they were at the beginning or at the conclusion of the Salvadorean civil war.

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14 According to the United Nations Truth Commission established as part of the Peace Agreement that ended the Salvadorean civil war, the conflict left approximately 80,000 Salvadoreans dead and 50,000 disabled; the vast majority of them civilians. It also destroyed large parts of the economy and infrastructure of the country. This report established that while both sides committed human rights abuses, government and right-wing paramilitary forces were responsible for 85% of these casualties (Truth Commission for El Salvador 1993).
Socially, El Salvador remains deeply divided along a left-right political cleavage that does not strictly follow economic class lines. For example, ARENA, the right-wing, pro-establishment party that negotiated the Peace Accords and controlled the presidency until 2009, finds some of its strongest support among the poorest provinces in the country. I take up the theme of political polarization in El Salvador and its effects on spaces of citizen participation in Chapter Five.

Historically, Chalatenango has been one of the poorest regions in El Salvador, characterized by a mountainous, inaccessible landscape, low population density, and a small-scale, agrarian economy. Between 1980-1992, Chalatenango became one of the focal points of the war. The FMLN received support from the civilian population, and was able to maintain military control over large parts of the Eastern region of the province.

**Municipalities in This Study**

I conducted my research in seven municipalities located inside or straddling this territory formerly controlled by the FMLN guerrillas: Arcatao, Chalatenango, Las Vueltas, Las Flores, Nueva Trinidad, San Isidro, and Nombre de Jesus, all small municipalities. With one important exception, all have a population ranging between 1,000 and 4,500 people. All but the town of Chalatenango are smaller than 40km$^2$ in area.$^{15}$

The Salvadorean armed forces declared all of these municipalities “Free Fire Zones” during the civil war, and implemented a scorched earth policy as a means of isolating the FMLN (Hammond 1999). Most of the civilian population in this region sought sanctuary in refugee

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$^{15}$ The town of Chalatenango is the regional capital of the province, and has a population of nearly 30,000 and an area of 130 km$^2$. Even though the town of Chalatenango remained in the hands of the Salvadorean army through most of the war, I have included it in this study because the armed insurgency controlled large sections of the outlying rural region of this municipality for much of the Salvadorean civil war. The FMLN also held the municipal office for two terms in the post-war period.
camps in neighbouring Honduras. The biggest of these was Mesa Grande across the border from Chalatenango with a population of about 11,000 (Hammond 1998). Other communities remained and organized itinerant, clandestine collectives that constituted the civilian base of support for the FMLN guerrillas.

All of the communities located in the municipalities in my study suffered significant human and material losses. There are several documented accounts of massacres of unarmed civilians by the armed forces from this period (Truth Commission for El Salvador 1993). Even 17 years after the war, the majority still have population levels that are below those they had before the war. As well, all of the housing, economic, and transportation infrastructure in these municipalities was completely destroyed. In most of the towns and villages in Eastern Chalatenango the only structures left standing after the war were church bell towers because pilots found these targets too difficult to strike directly from the air.

Today, these municipalities are recovering. Six of the municipalities in my study appear in the Salvadorean government’s list of municipalities of extreme poverty. Today most of the population in the seven municipalities in my study continues to farm; cultivating basic staples on rented land or on parcels redistributed as part of the Peace Accords. Unemployment remains rampant. One of the responses to limited employment and poverty has been outmigration. This has become a feature of all of the municipalities in my study. In the town of Las Vueltas for instance, over a third of all households have a member that emigrated to the capital or to the United States in search of work (Jean, Brune & Vargas 2006).

\[16\] Please refer to Appendix B: Population and Area of Seven Municipalities Studied. In more recent years, lower population levels can also be attributed to outmigration due to economic reasons.
Citizen Participation in Civil Society in Chalatenango

Organizational Structures

Politically engaged popular organizations grew and proliferated in Chalatenango and elsewhere in El Salvador during the cycles of mass mobilization for political reform and redistribution and repression that preceded the start of the war in 1980. Chalatenango’s geographic and social marginality made it a fertile ground for the popular education work first introduced by Christian Base Communities in the 1960s. These sites worked, literally, as incubators for community organizing, and schools for campesino leaders and activists who later filled the ranks of grass-roots popular organizations and eventually the armed resistance (Equipo Maíz 2000).

The first mobilizations of civil society in Chalatenango occurred during the period of intense organization and agitation for reform that preceded the war. Years of work by Christian Base Communities resulted in a generation of cadres occupying positions of leadership in unions, cooperatives and mass organizations that mobilized for land redistribution and social reform (Equipo Maíz, 2000, p.24). However, collectivist, participatory modes of organizing local social life in Chalatenango were born in the midst of the armed conflict. The development of organized civil society in Chalatenango is intimately tied to the civil war process.

Popular Local Powers (PPLs)

Those civilian populations that opted to remain in territory controlled by the guerrilla force formed the first instance of organized spaces for civic participation: Popular Power Committees (Poderes Populares Locales). These were regional self-governance structures that operated as parallel civilian governments in guerrilla controlled zones, and as a base of support
for the rebellion. PPLs were designed as democratic, coordinating bodies open to the participation of all, but with a leadership selected through elections, as well as through experience and demonstrated commitment to the common good.

PPLs were primarily the mechanism through which individuals worked collectively to meet their basic needs: food, education, health and security. Communities were typically divided into committees dedicated to carrying out these tasks. Research participants reported that PPLs operated through consensus on issues of community-wide concern, and through an elected leadership for day-to-day affairs. They operated on an ideal of full community participation in the deliberation and implementation of decisions. These communities and their structures operated under an ethic of unity, self-sacrifice and oppositional struggle for liberation. While PPLs were officially independent from the FMLN (the Salvadorean armed insurgency), they had organic links with the revolutionary movement. PPLs became a source of information, food supplies and combatants to the armed insurgency.

**Repopulations & Communal Councils**

Starting in 1987, groups of refugees and internally displaced persons began to return to the ten municipalities in northern Chalatenango the Salvadorean military had emptied and destroyed. These repopulations were a response to the deplorable living conditions in the refugee camps, but also part of a strategy civilians developed in coordination with the FMLN guerrilla leaders to change the terms of the conflict and to increase pressure of the Salvadorean government. The Salvadorean military allowed caravans of refugees back into the country under the intense international scrutiny of international media and observers. This presence helped ensure that while soldiers continued to harass and restrict the movement of people in the newly
repopulated communities, the army stopped short of renewing overt attacks on the people of the newly repopulated settlements (Hammond 1998).

In the absence of the local state, citizens adopted the practices of self-governance that PPLs had developed before them. Leonel, a former communal leader and mayor recalls how Communal Councils were born:

When we arrived and met with the people [there] we formed a community. There was an election with the participation of a large part of the civilian population, and we organized the first Communal Council. Of course we were an illegal Communal Council…We were in a conflict zone. No one recognized our legitimacy. We organized to provide education, health, agricultural production and to provide pastoral care. We organized to survive and started living there.

Apart from the Salvadorean army, the Salvadorean state did not re-enter regions controlled by the guerrilla forces after the conclusion of the civil war in 1992. Most of the municipalities in Eastern Chalatenango were governed for the first two years by nominal municipal councils. These mayors and councils often did not come from the communities they governed, had little or no contact with their constituents, and met only in the regional capital of Chalatenango.

Communal Councils during this period maintained a defensive, adversarial attitude towards these unrepresentative municipal governments. When the FMLN competed and won the 1994 municipal elections in most of Eastern Chalatenango, Communal Councils continued did not disappear however. The entry of elected FMLN municipal governments, as well as the new civilian police force and other newly established national institutions, did make Community Councils more complementary bodies in public life. The focus of work in most Communal
Councils, for instance, shifted to promoting economic and social development. Communal Councils also retained a number of specific and locally recognized competencies, including jurisdiction over water resources, communally held land, environmental protection and relationships with international supporters. Many research participants also reported viewing Communal Councils as counterweights to the power of municipal governments. Some people explicitly expressed the view that Communal Councils and other civil society participatory spaces are a “guarantee” that democratic participation will continue even if the FMLN loses control of municipal office. This view is strong among communities with a history of active oppositional action against the central government during the time of war.

While the importance of Communal Councils has decreased, citizens continue to expect municipal governments to consult and work closely with these bodies. According to a municipal councillor involved in promoting citizen participation throughout the region, Community Councils are essentially micro-governments. The actual level of collaboration between municipal and Communal Councils varies from place to place in many municipalities, though there are organic links and a revolving door connecting communal leaders and elected municipal officials in most towns in Eastern Chalatenango.

Another key feature of civil society fabric in Eastern Chalatenango is its regional forum: the CCR (Association of Communities for the Development of Chalatenango). The CCR was founded by the first six communities to repopulate Eastern Chalatenango before the end of the war. While the CCR’s initial mandate was to denounce human rights abuses, over time it has evolved into a regional umbrella organization that represents the broad interests of most rural communities in Chalatenango. For instance, the CCR led a campaign to stop a dam from being built that would have displaced numerous communities. The CCR also carries out capacity
building for local civil society bodies like Communal Associations. Today the CCR has expanded outside of its traditional region of support to represent 102 communities located in 22 of Chalatenango’s 33 municipalities. In addition to these communities, the CCR also has representation specific sectors of the population, such as regional women’s and youth organizations, as well as the bodies representing popular educators and war amputees in Chalatenango.

**ADESCOS (Associations for Communal Development)**

Since the end of the war, most Communal Councils in Chalatenango have sought to obtain legal status. Salvadorean law requires that Communal Councils register with the central and municipal governments and become ADESCOS (Associations for Communal Development) to obtain official sanction. Communal Councils have powerful motivating factors for this: Salvadorean law recognizes registered ADESCOS as the only non-state body capable of representing a geographical community – whether an urban neighbourhood or a rural village. In practice, this means that only ADESCOS can receive and manage funds from the different levels of government in El Salvador as well as from international development agencies. Communities need access to these funds in order to implement badly needed social and economic development projects.17

While ADESCOS fulfil many of the same functions as Communal Associations, many of their internal procedures are regulated by the state. These functions include the conduction of elections, record keeping, collection of membership fees, and finances. Importantly, the legalization process demands a level of literacy and an amount of money that not all

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17 The Salvadorean state and other actors insist that communities acquire legal status because in their estimation this guarantees a level of internal organization and stability required for managing funded projects.
communities possess internally. While some NGOs and municipal governments offer assistance with this process, it places a significant obstacle to citizens. Importantly, it is municipal governments that confer Communal Council with the status of ADESCO. Becoming an ADESCO is related to a community organization and effectively tying it to the state mechanisms of the country.

PPLs, Communal Councils, and now ADESCOs have all served as sites where the people of Eastern Chalatenango developed and practiced patterns of citizenship learning and participation. In the next section of this chapter, I examine the how municipal governments function in Chalatenango, before turning to study the patterns of citizenship learning and participation in both of these sites in Chapter Five.

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**Municipal Governance in El Salvador**

**General Overview**

El Salvador is organized into 14 departments and 262 municipalities. The extension of these municipalities varies significantly, with metropolitan San Salvador having an extension of 568km$^2$ and a population of approximately 1.6 million as the largest, to very small municipalities like those found in this study. Arcatao for instance, covers just less than 29 km$^2$, and has a population of 1,300. According to the 1992 census, half of Salvadorean municipalities have populations of fewer than 10,000 inhabitants (Gallagher 1999).

Municipal jurisdictions in El Salvador comprise several communities and extend into rural areas. A typical municipality usually includes the primary urban centre that acts as the political seat of local government, as well as its surrounding villages and hamlets, and territory. This is a system that has its roots in the Spanish colony.
A council consisting of a mayor, speaker, secretary, treasurer, and general council members, as well as their substitutes governs each municipality. Municipal councils are voted in every three years under the sponsorship of a political party. El Salvador is the only country in Latin America where mayor and councillors vie for office as a slate in a winner take-all contest. Because municipal councils in El Salvador do not include a diversity of political views\(^\text{18}\), they are vulnerable to the accusations of patronage and exclusion of their political opponents; accusations that are frequently well founded. Another weakness of the adversarial municipal electoral system in El Salvador is the lack of continuity it fosters. Incoming municipal councils often institute changes to intentionally undo the work of their predecessors that result in disruption of services and relationship after taking office.

Between 1931 and 1984, governance in El Salvador was characterized by authoritarian military rule, and rigid centralization that rendered municipal governments largely irrelevant in public life (Nickson 1995). This arrangement began to change in the 1980s when the central government placed decentralization on the country’s political agenda. However, conversations about giving greater power to local governments were primarily motivated by the desire to draw support away from the armed insurgency (Ibid.). These policies were never fully implemented due to the disruption created by the civil war itself. Work on decentralization in El Salvador only began in earnest again after the end of its civil war in 1992 (Schteingart & Duhau 1996).

More recently, the Salvadorean central government implemented a multifaceted decentralization programme that includes devolution of administrative powers and

\(^{18}\) Occasionally, two parties form coalitions at the local level and present a joint slate of candidates for municipal government. This is the exception to the norm, however.
deconcentration of functions\textsuperscript{19}. While Salvadorean legislators have expanded the fiscal and political responsibilities of municipal governments, they have retained final say in both of these areas of responsibility at the central level.

El Salvador’s municipal governments are still junior partners subject to the central government’s auditing system, as well as other regulatory mechanisms. Nowhere is this seen more than in the financial arrangement between Central and Local governments. Municipalities in El Salvador have very limited sources of income. Since they do not have the ability to generate revenue through property or road taxes as other municipalities in Latin America do, municipal governments in El Salvador depend almost exclusively on transfers from the central government or foreign aid donors (Nickson 1995). For more than nine of ten municipalities in El Salvador, the amount of the FODES transfers are larger than their own independent revenues (Gallagher 1999).

The transfer programme called FODES (Fund for the Economic and Social Development of Municipalities), designates 7\% of the central government’s budget, or US $160 million per year for municipal governments. These funds are distributed according to a formula that considers population (50\%), equity of distribution (25\%), municipal poverty rates (20\%), size of the municipality (5\%); (Alvares 2008). While the gradual increase in transfers from the central government transfers represent an important change, local governments still have very limited discretionary power over the funds they manage: 75\% of the transfers they receive from the central government must be spent on infrastructure, leaving the remaining 25\% for salaries, operations and limited lines of expenditure. This directly conditions the capacity of municipal

\textsuperscript{19} Devolution refers to the transfer of functions and responsibilities from central to local levels of government, which may or may not include the reallocation of resources and decision-making authority. Deconcentration refers to the dispersal of government functions away from the administrative core and towards outlying regions.
officials to respond to citizen expectations for municipally-driven economic and social
development or even to the policy directives of the central government\textsuperscript{20}.

The democratic results of decentralization in El Salvador have also been equivocal. On
the positive side, a recent survey found that an estimated 71\% of municipal governments in El
Salvador have adopted some form of citizen participation mechanism in local governance\textsuperscript{21}, and
that over 50\% have are experimenting with establishing permanent spaces for citizen
participation and government accountability (USAID 2007). These are significant advances in
local democracy given the history of authoritarianism, conflict and distrust that have
classified Salvadoran governance until the recent past. At the same time, the same study
found that these newly opened spaces for democratic citizen participation in local governance
tend to be used for partisan political purposes, and are sufficiently entrenched to survive changes
of administration in local government. Finally, this same survey found that scarce resources also
affected the capacity of municipal governments to effectively implement democratic initiatives
(Ibid.).

One of the ways in which municipalities compensate for the gap between the funds they
receive and their growing social responsibilities, is through third party funders. For municipal
governments in Eastern Chalatenango, this represents a continuation of previous patterns. In
many instances, funders / patrons have seamlessly switched to providing funding to municipal
governments from CBOs & NGOs. In many cases municipal governments have been able to
raise funds from external sources that far outpace transfers from the central government. This

\textsuperscript{20} The gap between the resources available to local government and their ability to respond to their new
responsibilities is well illustrated by the issue of garbage landfills: In 2006, the Salvadoran central government
passed legislation making open-air dumps illegal within 12 months. Without adequate technical expertise or
financial resources to comply with this new policy directive most Salvadoran municipalities were left scrambling to
find alternatives or face severe fines.

\textsuperscript{21} This includes participatory budgeting process, participatory municipal plans, and ad-hoc, citizen committees
organized around specific initiatives.
allows municipal governments to extend the range and coverage of services they provide (Cummings 2001). This is the case in about half of the municipalities in my study. They rely on the support of “international solidarity” organizations and religious orders to raise funds for social, environmental and educational programming.

Citizen Participation in Salvadorean Municipalities

Participatory municipal governance is still a new feature in El Salvador. Historically, the only channel for citizen participation before the post-war era was the Cabildo Abierto (Town Hall meeting), an institution that dates back to the colony in El Salvador and throughout Latin America (Villacorta 2001). The primary focus of these town halls was infrastructure spending. This history is significant because it set the precedent that still informs the character of CODEMs and other municipal forums of citizen participation. Importantly, the decisions made in town halls are not binding on municipal governments. Also, town halls do not provide citizens with a means to follow up on decisions made (Ibid.).

Following the end of the Salvadorean civil war, citizen participation in local government was reinforced through reforms to the municipal code. These reforms required the establishment of specific mechanisms, such as regular town hall meetings, popular consultations and the legal recognition of community-based organizations (Nickson 1995). However the legacy of mistrust engendered by the civil war meant that the use of these spaces has actually been until relatively recently very limited – much more so than in other Latin American countries (Ibid).

These limitations of municipal spaces for citizen participation help explain the low levels citizen engagement. In a review of studies on citizen attitudes towards municipal governments, Córdoba Macías (2003) found that while Central Americans uniformly feel that local levels of
government are the state actor best positioned to respond to their needs, most respondents felt that these bodies did not represent their interests. This helps explain why in 70% of Salvadorean municipalities, less than 50% of the population votes casts a vote (Castillo 2008).

Salvadorean legislators amended the country’s municipal code in 2003, as part of a comprehensive package of reforms to the Salvadorean state. At this time, legislators increased the areas of responsibility of municipal governments, expanding their mandate beyond infrastructure to economic and social development (Red para el Desarrollo Local, 2005). It was at this time that CODEMs became politically important and common features of political life in local government.

Two parts of these legislative changes are highly important to my study. First, that municipal governments did not receive sufficient additional resources to meet these newly added responsibilities. Second, that this new municipal code legally bound local governments to implement mechanisms of citizen participation.
Chapter Five

Findings

“no soy estudiado pero sí he vivido cosas” [I am not schooled, but I have lived things]
Jaime from Nueva Trinidad

In this chapter I describe some of the patterns of citizenship learning and participation that municipal officials have imported into CODEMs from civil society. I also discuss the effects these newly configured municipal forums have had on democratic citizen participation in Eastern Chalatenango. However, I begin with a brief synopsis of my interpretation of how people in Eastern Chalatenango understand the concepts ‘democracy’, and ‘citizenship’.

Local Understandings & Meanings

Civil society organizations in Chalatenango have developed local definitions of ‘citizenship’ and ‘democracy’ based on lived experience. I begin with a brief overview of these two key concepts because these ideas form the backdrop for the patterns of citizenship learning and participation at the centre of this study.

Citizenship

The municipal and communal leaders I met for this study invariably recounted very similar trajectories to the positions they have come to occupy in public life. Through the anecdotes that they shared a pattern began to emerge which led me to conclude that in Eastern Chalatenango, a system exists for socializing citizens into public life and then channeling them to positions of leadership. Communities with a history of organizing in Eastern Chalatenango have developed an informal graduated system of citizen participation where citizens move through progressively more intense levels of commitment and responsibility. For instance, many
of the municipal officials and civil society leaders I became acquainted with during my stay in Chalatenango recounted the experience of having been initiated into public life through manual work done to meet immediate needs. A typical example of this is taking part in communal labour brigades for food production during the war. From this platform, most of these leaders were encouraged to participate in community public forums and spaces for participation such as community assemblies. Many of the leaders I interviewed reported subsequently being recruited and groomed for leadership by previous leaders. In many instances they were nominated before they felt ready to take on new responsibilities, but felt they had to assume this role to respond to the trust and needs of their communities.

**Democracy**

Research participants reported thinking about democracy in Eastern Chalatenango as consisting not only of participation in formal electoral systems, but also of engagement in deliberation and in the implementation of decisions. Benedicto, a municipal councillor from Nueva Trinidad puts it this way: “it is not enough to just vote. It is important, but if we only cast our ballot y then remain sitting down, we are not going to be able to bring development to the community.”

Alongside this hands-on engagement, the ideal practice of democracy for people in the communities I studied contains a emphasis on the common good, and on egalitarian ethic. Diana, a municipal councillor and past president of a PPL in Chalatenango reflects this, “we are all leaders, but at times we are given certain positions where we have to be active, in order to pass on the message to the community.”
Patterns of Citizenship Learning Transferred

The municipal leaders I interviewed, like the great majority of the participants at the CODEMs I observed, have little or no formal education. When I prompted those who did go to school to talk about what they learned about being a citizen there, most recounted stories that related to teachers instilling patriotic pride or respect for authority. Most citizens and municipal leaders in Chalatenango came to their present understanding of citizenship through practical lived experience supported by a variety of structured learning situations outside school. Benedicto, reflects on the value of learning outside the formal school system:

We have had good leaders here; people who didn’t know how to read or write but who are very good though practice. These types of experiences show that you don’t need to go to school or university to be a good citizen.

While there was no integrated system in civil society for passing on local understandings of citizenship, community groups and other popular spaces of participation did develop a repertory of patterns to facilitate citizenship learning that worked to build a unified constituency with shared values and a common language of citizenship. Below I review some of these patterns.  

Informal Citizenship Learning Patterns

Incidental Learning Through Outreach and Exchanges

One of the key ways in which civil society leaders have promoted organized citizen participation has been through outreach. Communal Associations organized visits to non-

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22 I adopt Coombs’ (1968) classification of formal, non-formal and informal types of learning. Formal learning refers to credentialed learning that happens in the institutional, hierarchical, and state sanctioned educational system. Coombs contrasts this with non-formal learning that is also structured and typically mediated by educators and curricula, but which stands outside the official education system; and with informal learning – the lifelong process through which every person acquires knowledge, and which occurs in every other setting of life.
organized communities as a way of modelling citizen participation practices for communities where organizational structures did not exist. Diana recalls:

By the time people were paying attention – by about the fourth visit – we would propose that they elect their own Communal Association so that they could do the same [solve community problems] without our help. From that point on, we would go to support the work of the Association. That’s how we worked to expand our organization.

Another method civil society has used to spread interest in greater citizen participation has been by hosting delegations and organizing exchanges with “non-organized” communities.

Estela, a respected historical figure among revolutionary communities in Chalatenango relates: “we always receive people from other communities here. I show them how in Arcatao we have a sewing collective, a communal bank, a community owned bakery…‘why don’t we have this?’ they always ask.”

These exchanges transferred community development experience, and also showcased and model the patterns of community organizing developed by contentious communities to those who were not. Leonel, a former mayor, and civil society leader from Las Flores relates a similar experience:

They say ‘how nice, that’s how I would like to live in my own community’….we always look for ways keep them motivated. We explain, ‘look these things are achieved through organization…It moves them. They always end up asking, ‘how they can also become a part of the struggle?’

This intentional modelling exercise has become very successful as a way of increasing the number of communities affiliated to the regional civil society organization. According to Justo, a civil society leader from Nueva Trinidad, people realize that “the only way to get
[community development] projects is by organizing. So people start looking for ways to get organized, they call on the CCR to help them.”

The practice of outreach through community visits and community exchanges has produced a modelling effect, which is one of the key ways organized citizenship is spread and replicated in Chalatenango. Jaime, a community representative in a CODEM in Nueva Trinidad, recalls that these visits and exchanges played an important part in the organizational development of his community, “We went to ask and gather experiences – because they have been in the process longer. We saw how they organized, and that’s how we did it.”

Municipal officials have adopted this model of visits and exchanges as a way of promoting both the legalization of Communal Associations into ADESCOs as well as participation in CODEMs.

As they did when they were communal leaders, many municipal officials today continue to visit communities with low levels of citizen participation to motivate them to establish their own community organizations. Noel recalls, “the mayor walked up the mountain – there was no road – to help us organize our Communal Association.” Diana continues this practice as a municipal councillor today, “I still go out to visit all of the villages and hamlets. I help them elaborate participatory surveys of their needs. Everyone knows me.”

The amount of outreach carried out by municipal officials is significant. However, it is important to note that with exceptions such as that of Diana, this outreach is oriented towards facilitating citizen participation in state-sponsored spaces. I explore the implications of the change in focus from civil society at the end of this chapter.


**Supported Practical Experience as Self-Directed Learning**

All of the research participants in this study spoke about practice as being one of the ways through which they learned to be active citizens and civic leaders. Estela, reflects on how intimately tied learning was to local patterns of citizen participation through resistance:

I’ve always said that the entire process of the war was a school…we went to university as well. You are always learning. The work itself teaches you. As you get involved the work tells you what you how to deal with the situations you meet.

During the war, practice-based learning complemented trainings offered by civil society organizations, the guerrilla movement, churches and NGOs. For Noel, learning to be an active citizen and a leader “wasn’t only the formal workshops and trainings, it was also through practice. It was practice, and more practice.” Estela recalls that, “the majority of us leaders…we just had to jump in.”

Practice constitutes a pattern of citizenship learning in Chalatenango because it is a means through which individuals gained confidence, skills and the base of knowledge to become engaged. Civil society acted as the *supportive field* within which this happened. Citizens newly engaged in public life found encouragement in civil society, and more importantly, role models as well as a vehicle through which to channel their public engagement. Noel recalls his own learning process:

I have learned through my own experience and efforts. People showed me many things, but hard knocks teach you a lot. For example, I learned to fill out documents, application forms, and do what was necessary to get what my community needed. From 1997 on I began to seek out the development [of my community]. At that time there was no school,
no road, no electricity, no basic services…so we got our first road, and from then on it’s been a chain of projects.

Civil society leaders have taken that base of practical knowledge with them into local government when they enter municipal politics. Staff at a local NGO working to promote citizen participation estimate that between 70% and 80% of mayors and city councillors in Eastern Chalatenango were also civil society leaders. It is by being active in civil society spaces that citizens become engaged. According to Rodolfo, a municipal councillor in Nombre de Jesús, Communal Associations function literally as “schools for citizens, communal leaders and then municipal councils.”

Today, as in the time of the civil war, citizens and their civil society organizations remain primarily responsible for meeting basic needs. In this context, municipal governments do not support self-directed forms of citizenship learning, but they form part of the field of action where this type of learning can take place. As arenas of action, municipal governments have also become places where new leaders learn and develop skills, knowledge, and self-confidence. Estela recognizes this: “we in the CCR see CODEMs as one of the pillars for training new leaders. That’s a place to practice citizenship now too.”

**Public Arenas as Spaces for Political Socialization**

Civil society spaces for citizen participation functioned as sites of socialization into revolutionary culture in Chalatenango. The rural communities that make up the municipalities I studied acted as small, tight-knit islands of opposition in the midst of a culturally and politically hostile environment. During the civil war, community groups helped to sustain these pockets of resistance by functioning as spaces where revolutionary discourse was reiterated and enacted.
While some of this process took place in structured settings, arguably most was unconscious and unintentional socialization, and came about in the course of everyday routines.

Today, CODEMs continue to play this role of space of civic socialization for newly organized communities. While the discourse of community organizing, struggle and liberation are central to established civil society arenas for participation, many of the communities participating in CODEMs today did not take part in this history. Their Communal Associations are motivated by the desire to make concrete improvements to the economic and social wellbeing of their communities. Benedicto, a municipal councillor from Nueva Trinidad, explained: “in the past people were animated by a political combativeness, today they are motivated by different things.” Aware of this shift, civil society and municipal leaders often express the desire to have newly organized communities become more politically engaged. Leonel argues this engagement is necessary because “we haven’t liberated ourselves from anything in this country; we are still totally marginalized, and we have to work to change that along with new communities.”

Noel comes from one of these newly organized communities. He acknowledges the influence that participating in this space has had: “our starting point is the experience of those people who fought in the war, or participated in some way…we have inherited that experience.” The influence of historical patterns of participation is evident when Noel talks about the goal of public action in CODEMs as “continuing to fight for projects, to improve life in my community.” Like other leaders of newly organized communities, Noel has adopted the language of combativeness even when referring to a field of action (community development projects) that no longer involves politicized, contentious action against the government. Socialization in CODEMs, the only place where Noel has come into contact with the communities that supported the revolutionary movement, has influenced how he frames and
understands public action. Anastacio, a former popular teacher and municipal councillor from Chalatenango explains:

    It is good that they [new communal leaders] spend time with, and get to know revolutionary communities because not all communities are the same. It is good that they get together and hear and learn from the experiences of others.

Non-Formal Citizenship Learning: Training & Popular Education

Chalatenango has a history of structured adult learning based on popular education methodologies that goes back to the 1960s. During the civil war, this learning took place within PPLs in combat zones, and inside refugee camps. The structure of these learning spaces varied. They included Christian Base Community training centres, literacy circles, popular schools for children and adults, and ad-hoc classes among others. What they had in common, however, was that they subscribed to a radical understanding of education where everyone was a learner. They also used interactive, inclusive methodologies, and that in different ways they aimed a developing a critical – at times revolutionary – conscience in participants (Hammond 1998). In many cases instructors came from the same communities where they taught. According to Leonel, this was a system where “those who knew little taught those who did not know.”

This tradition persists today on a much smaller scale. The CCR, the regional umbrella organization for Communal Associations, organizes “political schools,” a monthly series of training workshops for leaders of Communal Associations. These trainings focus on providing a critical analysis of political and economic issues in El Salvador. Like their predecessors, these

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23 Hammond (1999) has concluded that the horizontal transfer of experience is a feature of non-formal citizenship learning spaces in Chalatenango. Many leaders of Christian-base Communities, peasant organizations and political-military groups, for instance, became organizers and popular educators in refugee camps.
trainings workshops aim at engendering citizen participation. Justo speaks about the role of political schools, “we have political schools to meet the urgent need to training new leaders.”

Municipal governments have also adopted the strategy of organizing regular spaces for adult citizenship learning, often using popular education methodologies as well. However, a key difference in the way that municipal governments organize non-formal learning spaces these are most often ad-hoc trainings, focused on specific, technical subjects. The most common type of popular training I saw municipal governments provide focused on how Communal Councils can become legally constituted as CODEMs.

**Patterns of Citizenship Participation Transferred**

**Associational Citizen Participation**

Civil society in Chalatenango developed using a relational patterns of citizen participation. The defining feature of citizen participation in Chalatenango is being part of a civil society organization, or being “organized.” Maria explains: “… a population that is organized is capable of making changes, and make its wishes respected. An unorganized population becomes the victim of any threat against the wellbeing of the communities.”

The community and its organizations of representation are understood to be not only the medium through which citizens participate, but also one of its ends. The existence of a common good is taken for granted in civil society spaces of participation. The origins of this type associational citizen participation can be traced to the time when organizing began in civil society, when people depended on the collective to survive.

Municipal governments have adopted patterns of collectivist participation and sectoral representation. Representation in CODEMs, for example, is institutionalized by communities and
neighbourhoods, rather than individually. While any citizen can attend a CODEM, only the Communal Association or ADESCO – assumed to have its own internal democratic processes – has the authority to represent the interests of a community. This practice reinforces the legitimacy of communal organizations, as well as their authority. By using the structures of representation already established in civil society, municipal governments also augment the legitimacy of the new municipal arenas of citizen participation they are creating.

Similarly, municipal governments in my study have adopted the practice of sectoral representation. The FMLN has an internal directive to have a representation of at least 30% women in all of their elected bodies. In the municipalities governed by the FMLN in Chalatenango this practice is expanded to include youth, and from the major communities in the municipality. The town of Chalatenango itself there is also representation by other key “sectors” such as street merchants and transportation workers.

Municipal councils also affirm the importance of associational forms of citizen participation by directly supporting civil society spaces. Municipal governments in my study are directly assisting communities that want to organize Communal Councils or become a CODEM. Municipal councils have also adopted various measures to strengthen already functioning civil society spaces. For instance at the time of my research, the municipal council of Nueva Trinidad was drafting templates of work plans and guidelines for conducting meetings to assist Communal Associations in their work. According to Justo, a municipal councillor from Nueva Trinidad, “it’s a way of saying to them, ‘here is how you do it’… we in the council are very keen to see these ADESCOs work.”

Municipal officials’ commitment to supporting citizen participation is most vividly demonstrated by the fact that many mayors take money from their own salaries to support the
functioning of CODEMs and other participation forums. Many municipal officials are forced to take this measure because of the scarce funds at their disposal and the restrictions placed on this by the Salvadorean central government.\(^{24}\)

Rodolfo explains why municipal councils undertake this support to civil society organizing, “it’s necessary to animate local power. So that communities are supporting the municipal government. Municipalities need a local organ. Bad governments don’t like organized communities. Citizen participation is the key to the development of the municipality and the community.” It significant that Rodolfo is offering two rationales for municipal support to participation spaces: to strengthen community development, and to extend the presence of the local state. By defining ADESCOs as “organs,” Rodolfo is placing them not only in the sphere of municipal governance, but also defining them as a part of government. I explore the consequences of Rodolfo’s perspective – a perspective that is characteristic among elected municipal officials in Eastern Chalatenango - for the autonomy of civil society groups at the end of this chapter.

While municipal officials proactively recruit and seek to strengthen community-based civil society groups, their attitude towards the CCR, the association of civil society organizations, is more ambivalent. Municipal officials accept but do not encourage the participation of representatives of the CCR in CODEMs or other municipal forums for citizen participation. The municipal officials I interviewed generally explained this attitude by alluding the CCR’s regional and national policy focus, or to its limited resources and over-stretched personnel. However, the result of the stance is the absence of the CCR from municipal efforts to

\(^{24}\) El Salvador’s central government stipulates that 75% of municipal money must be spent on infrastructure projects. This means that support to civil society groups or citizen participation must come from the 25% left for operating budget costs. The central government earmarks the majority of that amount for salaries.
strengthen civil society participation. This is peculiar given that local-level capacity building for citizen participation is precisely one of the main areas of work for the CCR. The non-participation of the CCR from municipal forums is also significant because it deprives these state-sponsored spaces from a broader, more experienced, and more forceful civil society perspective in municipal affairs. In practice, municipal councils are supporting the consolidation and development of communal organizations oriented toward the state, while increasingly bypassing civil society’s independent regional forum. This is producing a shift in the configuration of participation and power in Chalatenango which I explore in the concluding section of this chapter.

**Contentious Stance Towards the Central State**

Because Chalatenango’s civil society organizations were born in the midst of, and as a response to persecution, they developed a strong oppositional character. Justo, a former Christian Base Community leader that is still active and highly regarded in public life today, puts this starkly: “if we had not been united, if we had not organized [ourselves], if we had not helped each other, well they would have killed us.”

The roots for this oppositional identity precede the war, however. Culturally, people form the communities in this study have traditionally been considered a marginal group in Salvadorean society. Central government officials and urban people applied the term *campesino* in association with stereotypes of rural people being uneducated and inferior. Today many people in Eastern Chalatenango have reclaimed this term and refer to themselves as *campesinos* with pride, as part of a cultural identity that identifies them working the land, and being self-reliant. This reclamation process was grounded in oppositional political identity that focuses
attention on the systemic causes for the dispossession, lack of access to formal education and political marginalization.

This contentious identity continues to inform the stance of civil society in Chalatenango today toward the central government which it sees as representing the interests of El Salvador’s wealthy elite. Justo continues:

…if the government opens spaces we will applaud them, if it closes them we will make our demands heard, and are capable of following through the ultimate consequences…. it is all part of the struggle for definitive liberation, and for an integral form of development.

Municipal governments have emulated this contentious stance towards the central government. Mayors and city councillors often inject the same oppositional tone to the forms of participation they facilitate in CODEMs. This takes the form of calling attention to the corruption, mismanagement and unjust policies of the right-wing party in power, while offering the FMLN as an alternative.

Overlap Between Civil Society and Partisan Political Groupings

Civil society organizations in El Salvador have always maintained a close relationship with the FMLN. The mass organizations of the 1970s for instance kept a strong link with the more contentious or revolutionary organizations that preceded the FMLN. This relationship was mirrored in Chalatenango.

During the war many civil society organizations, like PPLs, maintained a symbiotic relationship with the FMLN: many community-based organizations provided surplus food, personnel, services, and information to the then-guerrilla movement, and in exchange became
participants in the movement they believed would radically transform Salvadorean society. Civil society leaders stress the autonomy that they had within the community. Estela for example, recounts occasions when she disciplined young FMLN combatants who behaved inappropriately while visiting one such community she led. As a leader of a PPL, Estela not only had the authority to lead her community and to represent them in their affairs with the armed insurgency, but could also discipline offending members of the guerrilla army with the full support of the regional guerrilla command.

Civil society - state relations continued to evolve following a transition to electoral political system. Local civil society groups that were once an integral part of guerrilla structures, have developed an ambiguous autonomy from local party structures defined by multiple factors including pragmatic choice, historical precedent, affective ties, and social pressure. This was evident for instance, during the interviews I conducted with civic leaders. I found that virtually all of the participants in this research study used the terms “us” and “them” interchangeably when referring the FMLN. I interpret this to indicate that for the leaders I interviewed, boundary between civil society and partisan politics is still blurred. Justo explains: “sometimes, people have a hard time telling the difference between the one and the other. They see political party [the FMLN] as the same thing. That’s when we are in danger of losing our identity.” Maria offers a theory for the overlapping identities between civil society and the FMLN in Easter Chalatenango: “we are essentially the same personnel.”

Municipal officials also operate from the assumption of blurred public roles. As party members they are committed to obtaining political office, but as former communal leaders they are see themselves as belonging to the “popular organization” where they have their roots. I turn
to consider the extent to which the FMLN maintains this ‘popular identity’ in the final chapters of this study.

**Patterns of Exclusion**

CODEMs have also carried over the same patterns of exclusion found in civil society. While Chalatenango’s civil society leaders expressed value-based and rhetorical commitment to inclusion and democracy, this ideal is not always achieved. Gender and politically partisan motivated exclusion present two significant examples of the challenge to be internally democratic.

At almost every level, civil society has a leadership composed primarily of men between the ages of thirty and forty who came to into their positions during the war period. Most of my participants expressed concern about the under-representation of women from positions of leadership in civil society. Some of my interviewees acknowledged the presence of systemic internal or cultural barriers to the full participation of women public life in civil society. However about half, explained the low levels of representation by focusing on individual explanations. This second group thought that low self-esteem or lack of motivation, an attitude that women’s organizations in Chalatenango consider indicative of the reasons for this problem. Benedicto’s explanation is characteristic of this view: “I don’t think it’s so much that people are excluded as that they exclude themselves. It’s important to feel capable.”

Another group that is under-represented, or even absent from Chalatenango’s civil society mechanisms of participation are communities that sympathize with the political right in El Salvador. Although small in number, there is population that strongly disagrees with or even fears the FMLN, and the communities that identify with it. Given the recent history of war, and
the persistent political polarization of El Salvador, this is not surprising. The result, however, is that these communities very rarely participate in public spaces provided by municipal governments. As in the case of women, leaders tended to read their absence as a matter of choice, rather than as a symptom of unintentional, structural exclusion.

These two patterns of exclusion have also been transported into municipal government. All of the municipal councils in my study fell short of the benchmark for representation of women set by the FMLN. Similarly, right-wing or counter-oppositional communities are mostly absent from CODEMS. Municipal officials do extend invitations to these communities, but are mostly unaware or unconcerned by overt and subtle ways in which they may be denied access.

CODEMs are not politically neutral spaces. During the course of my research, for example, I observed significant portions of meetings of the CODEMs be taken up by presentations or interventions of representatives of the FMLN - with the tacit support of the municipal officials in change. Indeed two of the meetings I witnesses, these party militants referred to the civic space they had been invested to attend as the “party’s base committee” for that municipality. Municipal leaders blended citizen participation and politically partisan work inside CODEMs in more subtle ways as well. The partisan party perspective was always present as an undercurrent in all discussions. While this dynamic may be responsible for deterring pro-government communities from participating, it may also undercut public participation in the long run. I explore this in greater depth below.
**Results of the Transfer**

Municipal governments have adopted citizenship learning and participation practices from civil society. Their results vary, but overall these new practices have contributed to expanding local democracy, and shaping it to reflect the institutional municipal framework.

**A More Effective System of Citizen Participation in Municipal Government**

CODEMs have provided citizens with a collective, permanent voice that can negotiate and give continuity to dialogues with the municipal government and other development agents. One benefit many participants identified was that municipal work now more closely reflected the priorities and needs of communities. Community members also take ownership over specific work and become directly involved in the implementation of projects. CODEMS have also produced more transparent government. Citizens come to know the budget and work of the municipal government.

Municipal officials generally expressed satisfaction with the close working relationship they develop with communal leaders as a result. CODEMs have also created spaces for collaboration between civil society and state that produce better overall service delivery. Rodolfo affirms that this is one of the strengths of CODEMs:

At the CODEM, we [municipal council] work hand in hand with the Communal Councils on all issues, even for garbage collection. We do not have a truck to collect garbage, but the Communal Association for Arcatao does. So we give them money for gasoline and pay the salary of the garbage collectors. It’s nice to be able to solve problems like that.
Increased Potential for Public Dialogues Across Political Party Lines

Salvadorean politics have remained intensely polarized and belligerent along political left and right since the end of the war. In Chalatenango, this divide is enacted more intensely because people were directly affected. Generally, this produces a dynamic where supporters of the party out of municipal office rarely participate in the participatory spaces provided by the government in power.

However, there have been some exceptions to this rule that indicate that CODEMs can become arenas that contribute to creating solidarity between citizens. The most notable case of this was in Chalatenango. Anastacio, a former FMLN city councillor from the town of Chalatenango, relates the story:

Historically, Reubicaciones\(^{25}\) never had clean drinking water. During our second term in office we decided to consult people through the CODEM, we even held special forums in the towns and hamlets to ask people if we could use that year’s budget in Reubicaciones. We told them this would mean that they wouldn’t get their budget but that there was a settlement of more than 10,000 without clean drinking water. Eventually every community had its own vote, which they brought back to the CODEM. They all voted in favour. What was different about this experience is that 80% of people in Reubicaciones are ARENA supporters.

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\(^{25}\) Reubicaciones means relocated in Spanish. It is the name of a suburb of Chalatenango that was created to house residents from a number of villages displaced by the construction of a hydroelectric dam. Residents of Reubicaciones are traditionally strong supporters of the right-wing party of El Salvador, and regard the FMLN with suspicion and hostility.
This example suggests that CODEMs have the potential to become arenas of solidarity building, and creation of versions of citizenship that are still engaged, but that escape the binary oppositional politics.

**Forms of Participation Limited by the State’s Institutional Framework**

Participating in CODEMs has given civil society groups in Chalatenango an entry point into the state’s resources and legitimacy. However this type of participation occurs within the bounds set by the Salvadorean state, which attempts to set the terms for the citizen participation in the state and for its ultimate goals.

The Salvadorean municipal code limits citizen participation in local government to voting during elections, providing input into municipal council decisions, and to reciprocal information sharing. By choosing to participate in CODEMs, citizens agree to this collaboratory approach and more limited repertory of action.

The range of issues citizens can engage in CODEMs is also limited. In CODEMs, citizens can deliberate about the allocation of resources to community priorities, but are far removed from decisions about the resources the central government designates for this purpose. Ultimately, the Salvadorean state is setting horizons to issues that are local, instrumental and short-term in nature. Unlike forms of citizen participation developed in civil society, CODEMs generally exclude deliberation regarding broader social relations.

**Citizen Participation that is Susceptible to the Encroachment of Partisan Politics**

Despite the example of the water project for Reubicaciones above, when municipal officials do expand the terms of public discussion to questions of policy, they generally channel
it towards partisan, oppositional perspective. In practice, this turns CODEMs and other municipal spaces for citizen participation into platforms for promoting the FMLN and criticizing the conservative party. Rodolfo explains why officials use CODEMs for partisan political purposes:

The negative policies that affect us, we have to tell people that they are the result of the choices of the central government, and the party that is in power there…that’s when we sometimes cross the line into politics, but you have to have the courage to touch these things.

I often observed municipal officials in CODEMs advocate for the position that FMLN is the only option for responding to the policies of the central government. This excludes the possibility citizen action through other avenues including civil society. By acting to mobilize citizens through public spaces of participation for partisan ends, municipal officials are compromising the integrity of these spaces and instrumentalizing its citizens.

**Citizen Participation that is More Contingent on Municipal Government**

While CODEMs do provide greater sanctioned access to municipal government decisions, the ‘invited spaces’ they constitute can also be more tenuous, contingent and vulnerable to abuses of power than the forums civil society established in oppositional communities in Eastern Chalatenango.

There is a power imbalance between civil society and municipal governments. Salvadorean law compels municipal governments to create and facilitate spaces for citizen participation like CODEMs. However the decisions citizens and municipal officials take at CODEMs have moral rather than legal weight. The non-binding quality of a CODEMs decisions
means that municipal councils can disregard or even contravene agreements taken there, if are willing to absorb the political cost. Conversely, civil society organizations participating in CODEMs are dependent on the maintaining a good relationship with government officials since these officials keep ultimate control over funds. This dynamic creates an incentive for civil society leaders to reduce criticism and friction with municipal decisions. In the traditionally oppositional political culture of Easter Chalatenango, civil society organizations also face the added pressure to close ranks with FMLN administrations.

The vulnerability of CODEMs is highlighted when there is a change of administration in municipal government. In 2006 when the FMLN lost the elections in the town of Chalatenango to ARENA, its main right-wing competitor, the incoming council deliberately undercut structures of citizen participation. Within weeks of taking power, the new council reversed many of the budget decisions taken by its predecessor, as well as its agreements with the CODEM. The incoming mayor and council went so far as to dissolve the CODEM, and according to research participants, replace it with an alternate forum composed primarily of supporters from their political party. This new council also made it more difficult for ADESCOS in communities that traditionally support the FMLN to retain legal status.26

Municipal governments are also the partner with greater share of resources in civil society - state forums. By becoming ADESCOS and participating in CODEMs, Communal Associations step into an arrangement organized according to the institutional regime of the Salvadorean state. Many municipal governments in El Salvador are supporting the development of civil society organizations as a means to obtain just enough of the citizen engagement they need to plan, budget and make viable other of their participatory processes required by this

26 The new mayor refused to swear in the communal leaders elected to lead the ADESCOs of five villages known to be FMLN supporters. By withholding official recognition, the council made compromised the legal standing of the ADESCO, and potentially, their ability to receive funds from governmental and non-governmental sources.
regime (Cummings 2001). I did not observe or hear about this cosmetic use of participation in Eastern Chalatenango, but did receive anecdotal evidence about it in other regions of El Salvador. Civil society leaders from various municipalities in El Salvador complained of this limited municipal view of citizen participation at a national conference in municipal governance I attended.

**Competition between Civil Society and State for Citizen Participation**

Another important outcome of CODEMs relates to their effect on non-state sponsored spaces for citizen participation.

With its array of community-based and sectoral groups, there is a constant demand on citizens in Chalatenango to participate in public life. This creates a particularly heavy demand on the community leaders who represent their communities in various venues, and sometimes have to travel on from early morning to attend meetings. In addition, conflicts in scheduling often mean that a communal leader has to make a choice between participating in one public space over another. During my time in Chalatenango I saw participation in autonomous civil society spaces like communal assemblies fluctuate, particularly during periods when municipal governments and NGOs also held meetings. That citizens or communal leaders would choose to take part in a CODEM rather than a CCR assembly is understandable: participation in forums organized by municipal councils usually involve allocation or oversight over resources, and its impacts much more immediate. By contrast, citizens discuss a much wider range of issues in civil society forums. The latter have a much wider mandate that can range from settling conflict, to setting long-term priorities, to building relationship that do always offer the same type of
short-term, tangible benefits that arenas provided by municipal governments do. Consequently, municipal governments end up absorbing energy and participants away from civil society spaces.

There is also a more structural tension between civil society and CODEMs. Several of the municipal leaders I contacted expressed the view that the FMLN is better positioned to effectively address broader social issues than civil society organizations, particularly to meet their needs and to represent them before the central government.

The prevalence of these suggestions indicate that there is a shift in what municipal officials see as the best arena for citizenship learning and participation. In some instances this goes as far as dropping the notion of the complementarity between the civil society and state actors in public life. This is illustrated by a conversation I had with an FMLN official who strongly advocated for rechanneling citizen participation through the party rather than the CCR.

This change potentially creates a situation where civil society organizations and the FMLN are vying with each other to be the primary actor to conduct citizen participation. This situation raises questions about the long-term impact of the augmented role of local governments and their use of citizenship learning and participation practices.

**More Goal Oriented and Individualized Forms Citizenship**

The use of non-formal methods of citizenship learning in Chalatenango has decreased. There is less interest today among municipal officials, and among citizens for engaging in broad social analysis. When local governments do organize non-formal citizenship learning initiatives in CODEMs for instance, these are typically focussed and goal oriented. Most of the training
workshops municipalities organize for their citizens tend to be issue specific or are oriented to supporting engagement with the local government.\(^{27}\)

When the non-formal learning spaces sponsored by municipal governments do incorporate broader social questions, such as the purpose of participation, these discussions are generally informed by an oppositional discourse primarily concerned with critiquing the right-wing central government.

In the occasions where I observed municipal officials explicitly discuss their role enhancing citizenship learning through local government, they tended to focus on training citizens to accept a fee-for-service system to ‘create a culture of paying local taxes’.\(^{28}\) Municipal officials also frequently talked about how to create educational spaces in CODEMs that would help lower citizen expectations for service delivery, bringing them into line with available resources.

While these conversations are understandable given the financial constraints municipal officials face, they are premised on an approach to citizenship learning that is radically different from the ones developed in Eastern Chalatenango: specifically, an iteration of citizenship that focused on the individual rather than the collective, where the state rather than society is the primary field action, and whose purpose is better livelihoods and service delivery rather than radical social inclusion.

\(^{27}\) The majority of municipal governments in Eastern Chalatenango offer communal leaders trainings on the process of obtaining legal status in collaboration with local NGOs. They also offer trainings around particular areas of concerns such as protecting natural water sources, recycling and the like.

\(^{28}\) This refers to the arrangement where municipal levies pay for municipal services such as street-lighting, garbage pick up and the like. Citizens in Eastern Chalatenango are understandably reluctant to pay for services that they see as essential services that municipal government should provide.
Chapter Six
Interpretation

In the previous chapter I reviewed some of the citizenship learning and participation practices associated with CODEMs. I conclude that democratic citizen participation in municipal government improved as a result, but that at the same time the configuration of citizen participation in civil society was rendered more vulnerable. In this chapter I explore the reasons that may help account for these ambivalent results.

I begin this exploration by considering factors acting that inhibit and support democratic state-sponsored spaces of citizen participation that are already present in my data. To do this, I draw on elements from my literature review regarding municipal governance in Latin America and the democratic performance of oppositional groups that achieve in state power. In the second section of this chapter, I try to develop a more integrated interpretation of the democratic results of CODEMs by revisiting the theoretical the concepts of the public sphere, state-civil society inter-relationship, and the metaphors of invited and autonomous space I originally outlined in Chapter Three.

A Context-Focused Approach

Factors that Inhibit Democracy in Local Governance

In the course of my research I identified two factors that inhibit democracy in local government that can be directly traced to contextual factors. The first are the patterns of exclusion already present in civil society that communal leaders carried into local government. The second are of the budgetary constraints municipal these officials encounter once they are in
office. Below I explore how these factors condition the democratic result of the transfer of patterns of citizenship learning and participation into local government.

**Patterns of Exclusion Carried Over from Civil Society**

Not all citizens in Eastern Chalatenango experience the patterns of participation and citizenship learning developed there as inclusive or emancipatory. The democratic deficiencies in the new configurations of citizenship that CODEMs are producing can be partly traced to these origins.

I found that patterns of civic participation in Eastern Chalatenango are fluctuating. While the leadership civil society remains relatively constant, fewer citizens are participating in traditional civil society spaces in many communities with strong histories of politicization and alignment with the FMLN. Conversely, several communities that do not have a history of organizing or politicization are experiencing an increase in citizen participation, and are actively establishing civic organizations.

The first tension I noticed in ‘historical’ communities is that while both citizens and municipal leaders have made the shift from meeting ‘emergency’ needs to reconstruction and development as the focus of civic action, civic leaders continue to use revolutionary language and values as the motivation and mechanisms for mobilizing citizens. When citizens fail to be inspired by these traditional approaches to civic participation, community leaders blame them for having a lack of commitment. Leonel’s assessment is characteristic:
Organizing was much stronger from 1975 to ’79. Today we have [civil society] organizations but they don’t have the same spirit of sacrifice, militancy, commitment…all those things. Today we have become too comfortable. If I am invited to an event, I might go, but only if transportation is provided.

It is true that people in Chalatenango now live free from state violence, and that many have met their basic needs. Even remote communities in the municipalities in my study are in the process of securing basic infrastructure through their municipal governments. However despite these advances, living conditions for many in many organized communities remain abject. Thirteen of the twenty-five poorest municipalities in El Salvador are located in Eastern Chalatenango; indices for health, nutrition, income, and literacy remain comparatively low, while outmigration and remittances continue to increase in importance (Red Solidaria 2008). These unmet needs and the increasing levels of community organizing in some parts of the population suggest that there are reasons behind changing fluctuating levels of participation in civil society other than a lack of urgency or commitment by citizens.

The analysis of Silber (2004) and Saldaña-Portillo’s (2003) regarding revolutionary fatigue and experiences of exclusion among historically contentious communities provide a useful lens for understanding this phenomenon. From this perspective, uneven levels of citizen participation are not a sign of poor civic spirit or commitment (an individualized interpretation of the problem). Rather they are logical responses arising from dissatisfaction with the traditional power configuration between civil society a state that have been inadequate in improving the material conditions of the population beyond a bare minimum – no matter how much citizens participate in demonstrations, teach-ins, and meetings. Silber’s analysis for the declining levels
of participation among women in particular are consistent with the low levels women’s representation in leadership structures I observed.

This analysis does not negate the integrity or monumental sacrifices civil society leaders have made to maintain spaces for participation and citizenship learning alive in the face of a hostile environment and inadequate resources. Neither am I claiming that the revolutionary understanding of Salvadorean social relations is wholly irrelevant. Clearly class-based inequality remains central to how social relations are organized in El Salvador. Rather, I am developing the theme that by appealing to classic revolutionary language and symbols, civil society leaders are reproducing exclusion and limiting their ability to respond to the present needs of the communities they represent. I observed for instance, how the deployment of revolutionary narrative may intimidate the non-partisan, and actively discourage supporters of the FMLN’s ‘rivals’ from participating in CODEMs. In addition, the continued use of scrupulously oppositional narratives works over the long term to reinforce a binary understanding of citizen participation and political action. Specifically, it limits citizens’ potential to act or imagine modes of public action that extend beyond the bi-polar, oppositional template established by the civil war.

**Decentralization & Insufficient Resources**

Even when municipal leaders transfer patterns of citizenship learning and participation from civil society, their capacity to implement these effectively is limited by economic constraints. The research participants in the present study identified the limited revenue they receive from the central government and the ‘excessive’ degree of control and monitoring that the centre still retains as important barriers to extending spaces of participatory local democracy.
According to Rita, the mayor of Las Vueltas and a former leader of the CCR, “the money isn’t enough to respond to the expectations or needs of the people.” This view is consistent with those of all of the municipal officials I encountered in Eastern Chalatenango, as well as with the findings of the survey of municipal governance practices I cited in Chapter Four.

These institutional constraints have limited the ability of municipal governments in Eastern Chalatenango to respond to the new and growing set of responsibilities downloaded from above and demanded from below. Decentralization policies affect the democratic potential of CODEMs and other state-sponsored spaces in two ways. First, they limit the resources that municipal governments can dedicate to supporting spaces for citizen participation. Civil society leaders like Justo are aware of this issue:

The central government speaks about decentralizing water health, education... but they decentralize responsibilities and not resources, and what looks good at first glance turns out to be a threat. It’s the same thing with citizen participation. In many cases CODEMs do not have the resources to function properly.

Ultimately, the inadequate funding for supporting citizen participation limits the number of times CODEMs can meet to carry out their functions. It also decreases the number of opportunities that can be dedicated to capacity building; a strategic priority since citizens participating in a CODEM need to have a base of knowledge, and skills to properly carry out their mandates.

The chronic underfunding of CODEMs, and of municipal governments more generally, also works to circumscribe the options of deliberation and action citizens think are available to them: in the first instance, because CODEMs are not able to take on the number of projects or

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29 The biggest expenditures are transportation and lunch for participants – many of whom have to give up a day’s work of farming and walk several hours to get to meetings.
initiatives citizens or municipal officials want. Secondly, because over the long-term this experience may condition citizens to lower their expectations of what can and should be achievable through participation in public spaces. The lowering of the horizon of expectations applies in particular to newly organized communities. CODEMs are the primary vehicle through which citizenship learning is conducted for these communities, and without the opportunities to develop the skills or values that oppositional communities had, citizens in these communities are more likely to accept diminished expectations.

**Factors that Encourage Democracy in Local Government**

I also encountered three main contextual factors that help account for the democratic effect of the transfer of patterns from civil society to local government. One of these is the influence of “autonomous spaces” where civil society deliberates on public issues, and from which it can exert influence over the state. A second factor relates to institutional and interpersonal relationships in Eastern Chalatenango. These relationships have weight in this region of small, tight-knit communities. The third factor that supports democratic governance that I choose to highlight here is the commitment of municipal officials to emancipatory values, a commitment born of their previous socialization in contentious civil society.

**Autonomous Civil Society Spaces**

Municipal spaces for citizen participation in Chalatenango are strongest in municipalities where citizens are already actively engaged in civil society organizations. The CODEM in Nueva Trinidad, for example, has the highest turnout rates - 40 to 50 people per meeting – among those I observed. Nueva Trinidad may also have the most active organizational life of any of the
communities where I conducted research. In addition to ADESCOs representing each community and neighbourhood in the municipality, Nueva Trinidad also has a number communally run enterprises and communal organizations doing issue-based and sectoral work\(^{30}\).

Undoubtedly, the relationship between a vigorous public life in civil society and in arenas provided by the state is reciprocal. However, the intensity and number of most civil society organizations in Nueva Trinidad precedes the emphasis that the municipal government has given to the CODEM. For instance, Nueva Trinidad is only the second municipality in Chalatenango to adopt an official gender equity policy. This change required much educational work and lobbying, and was the result of pressure from various civil society groups working apart from municipal spaces for citizen participation. These groups identified a need for changing municipal policies, and then developed a strategy for addressing it. Reportedly, municipal and FMLN officials in Nueva Trinidad initially met the idea of a gender equity policy with some resistance. That the proposal was successful speaks to the effectiveness of well organized autonomous civil society spaces.\(^{31}\)

**Institutional & Interpersonal Relationships**

One of the reasons for the correlation between a robust civil society and greater democratic openings in municipal governance may be that strong community groups are able to “claim” municipal spaces like CODEMs to support and hold municipal accountable to their democratic commitments. Citizens have also used “informal” channels of exercising pressure to expand democratic spaces. For instance, Javier, the mayor of one of the municipalities in my

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\(^{30}\) Among the most active of these structures are the women’s association, the youth government, committees for environmental protection, popular education, health, and water management, a public library, a day-care, a communal store, and various cooperatives.

\(^{31}\) Last Vueltas is the only other municipality in Chalatenango to have adopted a gender equity policy. In the case of Las Vueltas, it was initiated by the province’s first female mayor.
study and a former PPL leader, refused to establish a CODEM to support citizen participation for years after his counterparts had done so. This mayor insisted that he was able to get the same quality and amount of input from citizens through ad-hoc assemblies and his usual horseback visits to neighbourhoods and villages in his jurisdiction. Ironically, the municipality in question is known for having one of the highest levels of citizen participation in Chalatenango and in El Salvador, and to be a stalwart source of support for the FMLN.32 While this mayor resisted the pressure of his peers, he did agree to establish a CODEM when friends and neighbours began to lobby him during his “down time” in the community.

A feature of the FMLN administered municipalities in Chalatenango, is that they are physically and institutionally closer to the communities they serve than central government party officials. The entry of personnel from civil society to governance under the FMLN banner, and their continued immersion of these municipal leaders in their communities helps to ensure that they maintain close ties and continue to identify with the constituency from which they arose. The story of Javier illustrates how this proximity creates a greater incentive for municipal leaders of the FMLN to establish and maintain spaces for democratic participation. Leonel confirms this with his observation that democracy in Eastern Chalatenango “depends on human relations.”

Value-Based Commitment to Democratic Participation

Generally, FMLN municipal governments also appear to be ideologically closer the people they govern. I often heard municipal FMLN officials affirm their party’s history and continued commitment to democracy publicly and in private. They called attention to the ‘popular’ origins of the party and to its historical role in increasing political democracy and social justice in El Salvador. For all of the municipal officials I interviewed, supporting

32 The FMLM consistently receives more than 95% of the votes in municipal and national elections in Las Flores.
democracy from public office is a matter of personal conviction: “it’s a question of principles,” Leonel responded when asked about this. Rita explains that work in municipal office is a continuation of the popular struggle that many mayors and councillors took part in, “we were born to work for change.”

As individuals, municipal leaders often demonstrated their commitment to expanding democratic spaces through hard work and personal sacrifice; often they spent their personal money and much of their personal time supporting citizen participation. As a group, the commitment of municipal councils also demonstrated their commitment to increasing democratic participation in the state by adopting measures to facilitate this before it was a legislated requirement. My observations of municipal officials’ work to support local participation and democracy in Chalatenango are consistent with the “historical institutionalist” analysis I cited in Chapter Two.33

**Discussion**

The contextual factors I have just outlined help to explain some of the reasons for the mixed results of the transfer of patterns of citizenship learning and participation form civil society to CODEMs. In this section I try to arrive at a more integrated understanding for the reasons behind these results by focusing on the nature of state – civil society relations in Chalatenango. I draw on the concepts and theories that I explored in Chapter Three.

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33 This is the view that the origins of a political group will continue to inform its performance once it achieves power.
Colonized Public Spheres in Chalatenango?

CODEMs in Chalatenango function in many ways as the public sphere that Jurgen Habermas posits: they are spaces where citizens come together free from coercion to have publicly-minded discussions. For the present discussion, the concept of the public sphere is primarily useful because it draws attention to the possibility of different organizing logics informing how civil society and the state operate: The state from an instrumentalizing administrative imperative, and civil society from a rational communicative one. From this perspective, the ambivalent democratic outcomes of municipal spaces for citizen participation are the result of differences intrinsic to the characters of the state and civil society. Alone, however, this interpretation does not capture the complexity of civil society – state relations in Chalatenango, where municipal officials and civil society also demonstrate independence from state and politically party imperatives.

Municipal officials have adapted some of the practices of the state and their political party to local conditions. For instance, many municipalities in Chalatenango have disregarded the FMLN directive to cancel internal elections for candidates to public office. Similarly, municipal councils have found ways to support community organizing and social development projects while adhering to regulations that limit this type of spending.34

For their part, civil society organizations in Chalatenango appear to be asserting greater autonomy from the municipal governments as well as from the FMLN. In the post-war era, the urgency of the imperatives of unity and loyalty that supported the revolutionary discourse has decreased. Civil society leaders are increasingly differentiating the interests of their sector from those of the FMLN. Justo’s reflections on state – civil society relations capture this perspective:

34 Municipal councils usually hire people from the locality to work as labourers in local infrastructure projects. Some municipal governments have begun the practice of directing part of that money to the local ADESCOs, for investment in social development and community organizing initiatives.
In all of them, whether right of left, there is a lot of verticalism. This causes real damage. It’s the cause for the disillusion in people, why they don’t vote. [It is] because they feel there’s no real opening or flexibility. Rather they feel a great ambition for power…. In the political party the ultimate objective is the fight for power. That is its end. In civil society it’s the opposite. The ultimate objective is justice, freedom, [securing] respect for our rights; the power comes second. The political party is a medium.

Interviewees from civil society expressed the same critical distance when speaking about relations between the FMLN and civil society at the municipal level. For Jaime, “the [organizing] work is not dependent on the municipal government, but on the communities inside the municipality. The party affiliation of the particular mayor is not important to community development work.”

Civil society leaders, like Estela below, also spoke about the imperative of distinguishing between civil society on the one hand, and the state and the FMLN on the other in order to establish horizontal relations with civil society communities that are uncomfortable with oppositional discourse:

We in civil society cannot use both types of currency for the work that we do, for organizing. There will be contact with people who do not want to belong to our [political] party. So when we talk to them we have to talk sincerely about organizing and about development.

Civil Society – State Relations: Overlapping but Separate

These examples illustrate that while CODEMs function, at least in part, as vehicles FMLN and state interests, the encroachment of these interests is not comprehensive or its
outcome determined. What Habermas identifies as state imperatives have had to interact with local patterns of participation, and with the accumulated political culture of civil society in Eastern Chalatenango. Civil society organizations, and new municipal officials themselves, are the mediators between the state and local patterns of participation.

The encounter of state and civil society interests in Chalatenango can best be characterized as one of mutual but unequal influence, rather than direct colonization. Just as state provided spaces for participation may circumscribe autonomous forms of citizen participation, so have civil society groups at times been able to “claim” these spaces to expand citizen participation. The clearest illustration is provided by the correlation between participatory, empowered CODEMs, and municipalities where well organized civil society is already present.

The multiple points of contact, and exchanges between civil society and state in Chalatenango confirm the capacity for mutual influence between state and civil society. This overlapping quality in the nature of civil society and the state in Eastern Chalatenango is consistent with the relational understanding of state – civil society relations I referred to in Chapter Two.

In Chalatenango the fluid boundaries and synergy between civil society on the one hand, and state and the political party in the other is also the product of the historical connection between society organizations and the FMLN. Esperanza reflects on these origins:

I think we are the same. The party was born of the social movement, so the party owes its existence to civil society. First you become organized, and only afterwards [do you] get involved in politics…. so we are friends but there is a distinction.

Maria underscores the continuation of these historical ties: “we [civil society leaders and municipal officials] are still essentially the same people occupying different posts.”
While both civil society and municipal leaders often still work from the assumption of a broad coincidence of goals, increasingly it is civil society leaders that are making a distinction between the strategic interests of the civil society and the local state. Justo’s reflections again provide an example that is representative of many comments I heard from civil society leaders regarding state – civil society relations:

In some places there is greater separation, in some places less. Sometimes a civil society leader will also be part of the political party. That’s when things get mixed up and it can be difficult to differentiate things…. but our effort [as civil society] is to achieve independence between civil society and the political party.

The evidence of this study suggests that the distinction between the logics of operation existing within civil society and state is the precondition to democratic citizen participation. The establishment of broadly democratic participation patterns in community organizations in Chalatenango where none existed before illustrates this. However, the Chalatenango experience also illustrates that, given appropriate conditions, state sponsored arenas for citizen participation like CODEMs can expand democracy. The improved citizen participation in local governance and direct municipal support to community organizing are examples of this.
Chapter Seven

Concluding Reflections & Recommendations

In this final chapter I recapitulate some the key findings of this study into the results of the transfer patterns of citizenship learning and participation from civil society into local government. I also summarize my conclusions about the causes for these results. I finish by drawing on these insights to develop recommendations for further research, as well as for further work around democratic citizen participation in both civil society and in the local state.

Concluding Reflections

I opened this study using a guiding question: *What are the continuities and ruptures between local democratic discourses and practices in opposition and in government?* I found that the civil society leaders in Eastern Chalatenango that transitioned into municipal office did indeed bring their accumulated experience of participation in civil society with them into office. These new municipal officials applied patterns and discourses of democratic participation from oppositional civil society organizations to CODEMs, the primary arenas for citizen participation municipal governments have established in this region. This transfer is evidenced in the parallels that exist between the patterns of participation and citizenship learning in civil society and in local government. Collectivist forms of participation, a contentious stance towards the central government, and similar citizenship learning practices are just some of the patterns that can be found in both spheres.

My research into citizen participation in seven municipalities indicates that the democratic results of CODEMs are mixed. These forums increased public input into and oversight over municipal governments. CODEMs also enhanced civil society capacity for
systematic dialogue with the local state. In some instances, these arenas of participation even provided a rare opportunity for communication between citizens long divided along partisan political lines.

However, the effects of CODEMs for democratic citizen participation have not been exclusively positive. CODEMs also contribute to re-orienting citizen participation in public spaces to the priorities of the Salvadorean state. Through CODEMs municipal officials set boundaries on the character and horizon of public action. Citizen participation is oriented towards pragmatic short-term goals, to the state as the primary arena of civic engagement, and to the FMLN, the left-wing political party, as the primary channel for action. Citizens in newly organized communities are particularly susceptible to the influence of institutional state partisan party interests because they have not had the opportunity to develop an independent civil society perspective. Finally, CODEMs in Eastern Chalatenango also absorb energy and draw participants away from autonomous civil society spaces for participation.

Some of the roots of the mixed democratic results of CODEMs in Eastern Chalatenango can be traced in part to the patterns of exclusion already present in civil society spaces. For instance, elected officials often replicated exclusion based on gender and partisan political allegiance when they established municipally-sponsored spaces for citizen participation.

The equivocal results of CODEMs are also the product of institutional encroachment. CODEMs are intermediate spaces for citizen participation where the interests of the state and the FMLN come together with those of civil society. However, the relative influence of these actors on the make up of CODEMs is not equitable. The local government and political party posses a greater measure of economic power and legal legitimacy than civil society

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35 I place the FMLN, within the realm of the state also because as a political party its primary goal is to attain state power.
organizations. As I discussed in Chapter Five, many citizens participate in CODEMs primarily to access the resources they need to meet basic needs. Local governments on the other hand can function without effective citizen participation. Municipal councils can choose not to hold CODEMs or use procedural methods to expand or decrease a CODEM’s influence over their decisions. Municipal governments can even dissolve the spaces of citizen participation they create because the central government does not enforce the requirements on citizen participation it mandates. The effect of this disparity in power between civil society and the state is that the organizing logics animating the state and the FMLN have greater weight over the character of CODEMs than that of civil society.\(^{36}\)

Finally, a broader social shift in Eastern Chalatenango underlies the results of CODEMs: As the influence of the imperatives of war recede, citizens and municipal leaders increasingly move away from radical politics of social transformation and overarching social narratives, and towards a politics of the pragmatic oriented to achieving incremental gains and material well-being.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendations for Furthering the Practice of Local Democracy**

Fung and Wright (2003) draw attention to institutional design issues that make democratic citizen participation in state sponsored arenas possible. The case of municipal governments in Eastern Chalatenango also draws attention to the importance of the patterns of participation present in civil society, and to the relations of power between civil society and the

\(^{36}\) I follow Jurgen Habermas (1983) in asserting that the organizing logics of the state and civil society are different, though my findings indicate that these are not necessarily incompatible as Habermas theorizes. The local state and civil society in Eastern Chalatenango are able to exist in a relationship where (democratic) interests, personnel, and patterns of citizenship learning and participation overlap. Please refer to Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review for a review of Habermas’ ideas concerning the different organizing logics animating civil society and the state.
state as critical factors. The imbalance in power between civil society and the state present in Eastern Chalatenango cannot be wholly addressed through changes to the design of the institutions of participation alone. The experience in this region suggests institutional design approaches need to be complemented with attention to the relations of power between civil society and the state. Fung and Wright address this concern by calling for a “collaborative countervailing power” that is autonomous and capable of holding the state to account, while at the same time committed to working in non-contentious manner (2003, p.261). Organized civil society in Eastern Chalatenango often already plays this role. In places where civil society organizing is strongest, Communal Associations play the function of political counterbalance to municipal government. In some instances, civil society groups are even able to advocate for and defend spaces for democratic participation, as illustrated by the case of Nueva Trinidad where civil society groups were able to convince the municipal government to adopt a gender equity policy. Many civil society leaders and citizens I encountered also shared the belief that civil society organizations represent a counterweight and democratic guarantee should the FMLN ever impose an unpopular candidate, or the political right occupy municipal office again.

The role of these autonomous spaces goes beyond providing a bulwark against government abuse of power however. They are also sites where citizens “can develop alternative discourses and approaches, some of which might best remain at some distance from arenas which bring publics and their representatives together with officials” (Cornwall 2004, p.6). This distance is important to the capacity of civil society to develop analyses and proposals for social and democratic development that reflect the separation of their interests from those of the state.
Research participants positioned within civil society focused on the separation of civil society and the state when speaking about how to strengthen long-term local democracy. Justo illustrates this point:

…as much as we are militants in the FMLN, and much as we love our [political] party, the social movement has to be free. The social movement has to be independent and has to undertake its own struggles. We may have many positions in common…but when you become an appendage of the party, you lose your identity, your credibility and your popular power…As organized communities, our greatest struggle is to be different from the type of structure that we face in the government…even in the political parties.

**Recommendations for Municipal Governments**

Despite the resiliency they have demonstrated, inadequate resources are one of the most important obstacles civil society organizations in Eastern Chalatenango face to maintaining independent spaces for deliberation and action alive. Communal leaders often lack the funds to cover even the minimal travel and meal costs that are involved in holding assemblies, coordination or training meetings.

Municipal governments may be able to provide a solution. Municipal councils are also local-level actors interested in enhancing citizen participation. Most importantly, they have the resources to fund autonomous civil society spaces. Municipal support to “popular spaces” for citizen participation may be viable if the influence of municipal officials and the institutional imperatives they represent are isolated, or at least reasonably contained. This proposal would necessitate guaranteed funding for civil society organizations independently of their work or positions. It would create hybrid forums of citizen participation that contain features of both

In practice the creation of such hybrid spaces for citizen participation may not be as difficult as it appears. Municipal governments in neighbouring Honduras have successfully experimented with establishing permanent Municipal Accountability Offices that audit their work but report directly citizen assemblies. They key innovation that allowed these structures to thrive is that they are autonomous and accountable to citizens only, even though they receive stable funding from municipal governments. A key recommendation arising form the present study for governments and civil society organizations to explore the possibility of establishing similar arms-length, guaranteed funding systems that would support the existence of autonomous civil society organizations.  

**Recommendations for Civil Society**

As the testimonies of many of the research participants in this study indicate, one of the challenges civil society organizations in Eastern Chalatenango face is that of maintaining an autonomous identity in the face of pressure from the FMLN to remain uncritically supportive or even to conflate their interests. Increasingly, however, civil society is asserting perspective of critical support to the government. This is new stance is illustrated by CRIPDES, a national organization representing rural communities. Days after the conclusion of the 2009 elections, CRIPDES made a public statement outlining its new position toward the Salvadorean

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37 It is true that establishing a system that funds civil society organizations would be a complex undertaking. At a practical level, government budgets are already stretched to the limit just responding to basic needs. At a systems level, it would bring to the forefront the different principles of accountability present in civil society and the state. Nevertheless, ensuring the viability of autonomous civil society structures would be one of the best ways through which the central government could support local economic development and good governance.

38 The acronym CRIPDES stands for Association of for the Development of El Salvador. CRIPDES is the national counterpart to the CCR. Both organizations were founded by returned refugees near the end of the war. Today CRIPDES represents rural communities in the seven provinces in central El Salvador.
government. In this document, CRIPDES openly declared its support for the new central government’s agenda, while asserting its own right to conduct analysis and adopt policy positions that are independent. CRIPDES promised to be a vigilant, and when necessary, critical partner of the new administration in power. Other civil society organizations in El Salvador made similar statements. A second recommendation arising from this study is for civil society organizations at the local and national levels to continue to find ways of asserting an autonomous stance based on interests that can converge and at times separate from those of the FMLN.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further Research into the Changing Perspectives of Municipal Officials

One of the key findings of the present study is that state-sponsored spaces for citizen participation in Eastern Chalatenango imprint a state-centered framework on public life within and without these invited spaces, while at the same time marginalizing autonomous spaces for citizen participation. This is an unexpected result given the broad objective of expanding democracy that municipal councils espouse. It is particularly surprising because most mayors and municipal councillors in Eastern Chalatenango have previously occupied leadership positions in civil society organizations themselves. Yet, during the course of my research I heard several municipal officials imply or outright express the belief that citizen participation that is not tied to municipal governance goals may no longer relevant. In one instance, an official expressed that autonomous civil society spaces may even act as an obstacle to effective citizen participation in public affairs.

In light of this apparent inconsistency, further research to verify whether occupying municipal office does indeed change the perspectives and attitudes of former civil society leaders
would be useful. If this is the case, then it would also be important to study the process through which municipal officials come to privilege a state-centered vision over that of civil society, and whether this is conscious.

In retrospect, one of the most puzzling findings for the research I conducted in Eastern Chalatenango came during an interview with Leonel, a former mayor who has returned to a leadership position in civil society. During different conversations, Leonel strongly argued for the importance of autonomous civil society perspective. At that time, I did not probe into whether Leonel felt his position changed when left municipal office. However, Leonel’s views suggest that a fruitful line of questioning during further research would be whether civic leaders’ perspectives on the roles of civil society and the state are at least partially contingent on the position that leader occupies.

**Further Comparative Research**

Comparative studies into state-sponsored spaces for citizen participation present another potentially useful area for further inquiry. My finding that spaces for citizen participation created by municipal governments in Eastern Chalatenango marginalize independent civil society forums is the opposite outcome reported that the Participatory Budgeting process produced in Porto Alegre. In that setting new state-sponsored spaces for citizen participation served to strengthen the number of civil society spaces and the connections between them (Baiocchi 2002; Abers 2001).

This apparent contradiction in the democratic outcomes of state-sponsored spaces for citizen participation could provide fertile ground for further inquiry. There are significant differences between the participatory processes in Porto Alegre and Chalatenango, including the
scale of the municipalities, the structure of the participatory process implemented, citizen experience of previous political engagement, and how established civil society organizations are. However the similarities between the goals and some of the positive effects of Participatory Budgets in Porto Alegre and CODEMS in Chalatenango suggest a comparison into the effect of municipal spaces for citizen participation on civil society would be useful. In particular, further studies should focus on the conditions under which invited spaces for citizen participation contribute to or decrease the viability of popular spaces for participation in civil society. The results of this study suggest that the different democratic results of participatory processes are likely to relate to both the design of those spaces, as well as contextual issues; particularly the configuration of power between civil society and the state.
Postscript

I returned to El Salvador in February 2009 as an international elections observer when the political landscape of El Salvador was changing dramatically. Salvadorean voters had just handed the FMLN the largest block of seats in the National Assembly - though not a clear majority. In March of that year, the FMLN also won the powerful office of the presidency. These changes confirm the FMLN’s entrance into mainstream politics, and fulfil the promise of peaceful alternation in government established at the end of the civil war.

Leaders of Salvadorean left were jubilant immediately following the announcement of the elections results. Within days, however, they quickly moved to downplay expectations. This response is understandable; hopes were high - even among non-supporters of the FMLN - that the new government would address escalating levels of inequality and violence. At the same time, the FMLN’s options were limited by a global economic recession. An important area where the incoming government did promise to deliver rapid change, however, was democratic reform. The new administration made strong public commitments to open the state to greater citizen participation and scrutiny.

It will take time for the democratic openings envisioned by the new FMLN central government to translate into concrete policy change. However, the new political landscape is already beginning to produce some shifts in the way invited spaces of citizen participation are configured. For instance, FMLN control over the executive and legislative branches of government has made it more difficult for municipal and party officials to deploy reductionist oppositional discourses to explain social reality or to mobilize support.

In light of my conclusions regarding the importance of independent civil society spaces for democratic governance, the most interesting responses to the political sea-change might come
from civil society, as the case of CRIPDES above illustrates. In a country where unity and secrecy were of necessity placed before critical analysis within the political left, CRIPDES’ stance is radical. It is a rejection of traditional polarized politics and an assertion of the distinct roles of civil society and the state.

If CRIPDES and other Salvadorean civil society organizations are able to maintain an autonomous voice, then the combination of an engaged, independent and critical civil society together with the new government of the FMLN may indeed provide an important step towards widening and deepening democracy in El Salvador.
References


Appendix A: Interview Guide

Citizen Participation in Municipal Government

1. Citizenship Learning
   Citizenship Learning Process
   • How did you become an active citizen (or a leader) in your community?
   • What civil society organizations have you been actively involved with?
   • What positions did you occupy?

   Content
   • What did you learn through your participation in these civil society organizations?
   • Please name some of the specific skills / values / attitudes / practices that you learned through your involvement in civil society organizations.
     o Can you share a story to show this?

   Participation in Civil Society Today
   • Why do people continue participating in civil society organizations today?
   • What motivates citizens from communities that have not been part of the historical process in Eastern Chalatenango to become organized?
   • Does the experience of organized communities influence newly organized ones? Please describe how?

2. Local Understandings of Public Life
   Definitions
   • Based on your own experience of participating in Eastern Chalatenango, how do you define democracy?
   • What do people mean when they talk about citizen participation in Chalatenango?
   • Can you share some examples / stories of how democracy is practiced in Chalatenango?

   Changes in Understanding
   • Has the way people understand or practice democracy changed since the end of the civil war? How?
   • Has it changed now that you are in government? [for municipal officials only]
   • What is the relationship between local governments and civil society organizations in Eastern Chalatenango?

3. The Transfer to Local Government
   • Does the experience of municipal officials / your experience in civil society influence how municipal governments practice democracy?
   • What were your expectations for how your municipal government would facilitate citizen participation?
   • Were these expectations met? Why or why not?
• How have your views of citizen participation changed now that you are in government?

4. Citizen Participation in Local Government
   General
   • How do citizens participate in local government in your municipality?
   • How does the CODEM in your municipality work?
   • How would you like people to participate in local government?
   • So you see this process changing in the future?
   • What are some of the limitations and opportunities for strong citizen participation in local government?
   • How do the policies of the FMLN influence citizen participation in your municipality?
   
   Inclusion
   • How would you assess the state of women’s participation in municipal governments in Eastern Chalatenango?
   • How does your municipal government work to include communities that support the right-wing party?
   • Have these processes been effective?
Appendix B:
Population and Area of Seven Municipalities Studied

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* - Population levels at the conclusion of the Salvadorean civil war.